

LIZZIE OF THE MILL


FROM THE

GERMAN

CHRISTINA TYRRELL



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FROM THE GERMAN OF W. HEIMBURG.

BY

CHRISTINA TYRRELL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,
NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1880.

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PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
LONDON AND BECCLES.

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LIZZIE OF THE MILL.



CHAPTER I.

THE news of Countess Stontheim's death had awakened no great sorrow at the Castle, for the younger Baroness and Nelly had not known the deceased lady personally. The little girl twined fresh wreaths, and sent them to her cousin with a few sympathetic lines, and the three ladies put on mourning garments, in compliance with the usual forms, and chiefly out of compliment to Blanche, who, Armand wrote, was returning to

Derenberg for a lengthened stay. Army and her father were to accompany her thither.

And now the day had come when the visitors were to arrive. In Blanche's apartments the windows were thrown wide open, and the fresh autumnal air streamed through the luxuriously appointed, home-like rooms. The sunbeams played on the glistening pale-green satin flutings on the walls, and on the soft swelling cushions of the same hue and rich material. Bright autumn flowers bloomed everywhere in vases and baskets; and Nelly was giving a last careful look around to make sure that nothing would be wanting to the spoilt child's comfort. In her simple black merino dress, she looked like some stray enchanted princess who, by accident, or by the action of some good fairy,

had suddenly been restored to the sphere which was hers by right. The oval face, with its delicate rosy tint, was admirably set off by the deep black dress, and the white hands which peeped from under the crape cuffs, were almost too diminutive to be those of a grown-up young lady.

“It is lovely, this room, Grandmamma, is it not?” she said, looking up at the old Baroness, who just then appeared in the doorway.

“Certainly; but for you, my dear, I should prefer it in blue.”

“Oh, for me!” she laughed outright. “Fancy me in a room all silk and lace, Grandmamma. I should feel quite miserable in the midst of all this sheen and shimmer.”

“You will learn to feel at home in it, my dear.”

The young girl looked up quickly. The words were spoken so seriously.

“If my little Nelly behaves nicely, and does her best to lay aside her rough, wild ways, I will perhaps give her a bright little room like this for herself at Christmas,” continued the old lady, going up to her astonished hearer.

“You, Grandmamma?” cried the girl, incredulously. “Oh, no, I would far rather have one like Lizzie’s, all covered with blue and white flowered chintz. That looks so sweet and fresh.”

The old Baroness shrugged her shoulders and turned away, for at that moment her daughter-in-law entered.

“I have just received a great parcel containing materials for dresses and a quantity of patterns. Have you ordered them?” asked the latter. “I think there must be some mistake, for there

are silk brocades for furniture among them, and all sorts of things we cannot possibly use."

"I gave the order, Cornelia," declared the Dowager, impatiently. "Let the things be put into my room."

"Nelly flew away to see that it was done, and the two ladies stood confronting one another in silence.

"But," said the younger, at length, "what is this for?"

"Have you looked at yourself in the glass, Cornelia?" was the sharp retort. "You are hardly fit to appear before our servants on ordinary days, not to speak of a wedding occasion," she laughed.

"I had already bought a white dress for Nelly, and a black silk for myself."

"Of the cheapest quality—a thin Persian, such as circus-riders' skirts are made of. I know the article," replied

the old lady, scornfully. "Say no more about it. I shall buy what I think necessary."

"But, Mamma, dear . . ."

"You are going to ask, perhaps, where the money is to come from? Well, Cornelia, that house of business has made thousands out of me, and they cannot refuse credit to the Baroness Derenberg. That is enough for the present. But perhaps you would wish your son to be married in an empty drawing-room, where the curtains are dropping from the poles, so moth-eaten are they, and the furniture is worn into holes as big as that saucer. Your daughter-in-law would turn up her nose in disgust, you may be sure."

"I was not thinking of that," said the pale lady, closing the door, for a cool draught of air was blowing the silken

hangings from it far into the room. "I only meant," she added, coming back, and stopping near the handsome grand piano which Blanche had sent for during the summer, declaring that she could not play on that old harpsichord thing in the parlour—"I only meant that, as we are to be quite by ourselves, just our own family . . ."

"Yes, those are precisely your narrow views, Cornelia. Armand is not a nameless young adventurer who may celebrate his marriage in any corner where he may happen to light on a sweetheart. He is a scion of one of the noblest races in the land, and his betrothed is a connection of our house. I shall therefore take care that this ceremony, at least, be performed in a becoming manner. It would rouse a saint's temper, Cornelia, to hear how you express yourself on these matters."

With a heightened colour the old lady swept majestically past her daughter-in-law, and went up to the window. "I really must beg and pray that you will keep your opinions to yourself, and make some change in your manner of life when Blanche is here. If not, you will go just the way to make the place distasteful to her. She cannot endure the anxious care and economy, which calculates every piece of bread and butter that is eaten, any better than I can; and now our great object is to make sure of her—to make sure of her at any cost. When the final Amen of the marriage service is spoken, all our embarrassments will be at an end."

A crimson flush had mantled to the younger lady's cheeks, and tears rushed to her eyes. For whom did she pinch and save? Who benefited chiefly by

her care and economy? Why did she go about in those poor clothes? In order that the eccentric lady opposite should suffer as little as possible from the really grievous poverty which weighed on them, that she might in some degree live as she had been accustomed to live. Every evening tea and cold meat would be taken up by Sanna to the Dowager's room, while the younger Baroness and Nelly would content themselves with a little soup, or a simple piece of bread and butter.

“Now you are going to cry, I suppose, Cornelia?” said the voice which was so harsh and sharp in its pronunciation of German, while, when speaking its native tongue, it fairly melted into tones of mellifluous softness. “*Misericordia!* what sentimental creatures these German women are! It almost drives me mad

to see these ever-ready floods of tears. All that I said just now was in our true interest and for our good, if you would but see it in that light."

At this moment Nelly came back.

"It is five o'clock, mamma, and they may be here soon after six. The table is laid downstairs, and Henry is coming up here to light the fire and shut the windows. Oh, I am so curious to hear all they will have to tell, to see Blanche in her new mourning, and to know about the will." As she spoke, she looked at her mother and noticed the tears in her eyes. "Don't cry, mamma," she whispered; "Army will be here soon. Think—our dear old Army!"

"The will?" said her grandmother. "*Mon Dieu!* she half, and Army half, with legacies to servants, hospitals, etc., and probably a trifle to the gallant

Colonel, who is sure to have looked after his own interests."

"Yes, Grandmamma; but remember, Army said some time ago that Blanche was everywhere looked upon as the sole heiress . . ."

"Bah! Nonsense! In that case we should be even better off. A man has always control over his wife's fortune. But I don't believe it. My lady Stontheim was too fond of Army for that."

"But if the will was made *before*, Grandmamma?"

"Well, then she will have added a codicil," returned the old lady, impatiently.

"I wish I knew exactly when they would come," said Nelly. "The mail-coach generally gets in at half-past seven; but Army said in his letter that they should take a post-chaise and should rest

and dine at the station. However, between seven and eight they must be here for certain. Patience! I wonder if I shall ever learn it," she added, laughing at herself. "Just look what a splendid sunset! It will soon be dark now. How glad I am that Army is coming!"

Gradually darkness fell upon the Castle and park. One star after another sparkled forth in the heavens. The lamp was not lighted yet in the old home-like family parlour; but the fire on the hearth shed a sort of dim twilight through the room. Nelly and her mother were alone, for the Baroness had gone up to her own room. The young girl sat in the deep embrasure of the window, looking with great dreamy eyes up at the myriad constellations which studded the firmament above. Presently she rose, went

over to her mother, and kneeling by her side, passed her arm caressingly about her waist. The agitated lady pressed a handkerchief to her eyes, and her bosom rose and sank convulsively.

“Dear little mother,” begged the girl, in her sweet tones, “don’t make your eyes red with crying. What will Army think when he comes? I am sure Grand-mamma did not mean to be unkind.”

“Oh, Nelly, it is not that,” whispered the weeping lady; “but all day long I have been beset by an anxious presentiment, an uneasiness I cannot describe. God grant that nothing evil has happened to my boy!”

“But, mamma, what could happen to him?” said her little daughter, encouragingly, hugging the blonde head to her breast. “At this moment he is sitting in the great yellow post-chaise opposite

his Blanche—the pleasantest situation in the world for him. Uncle is telling them anecdotes, and they are all looking forward to a hot supper and the sight of your dear, kind face, little mother.”

The lady started suddenly from her seat in the armchair.

“What is it, mamma?” asked Nelly, anxiously.

“I thought . . . I thought I heard his step,” replied her mother, under her breath. “Did not you hear it too, Nelly?”

“No, mamma, and it could not possibly be Army, you know.”

All grew still again in the lofty chamber. The whispering voices were hushed—not a sound was to be heard save the crackling of the fire on the hearth, and now and then an anxious sigh escaping from the mother’s troubled heart.

“ But there, there ! That was his step in the passage, Nelly,” cried the Baroness, in a half-stifled voice.

The young girl flew across the room just as the door opened, and a tall figure entered.

“ Army ! ” exclaimed his sister, joyfully, and his mother’s pale lips re-echoed the cry, “ Army, can it be you ? ”

“ Yes, mother,” he replied, and there was an unnatural, forced sound in his voice, as though he were putting a great constraint on himself to appear calm.

“ My dear boy,” said his mother, putting her arms about him tenderly.

“ Dear old brother ! ” caressed Nelly. “ How glad I am to see you ! but do say, where is Blanche ? ”

“ Where is your betrothed ? ” asked his mother in her turn.

He was standing near the fireplace,

still wearing his cap and cloak; in the faint light cast by the dying flames his features were hardly discernible.

“I have no betrothed!” He spoke in a voice husky from emotion.

Nelly uttered a little scream; but his mother was struck dumb. This was the trouble she had dimly foreseen and apprehended. She pressed her son’s hands tightly in hers, as though she would rouse him from some horrible, bewildering dream.

“Don’t make me give way, mother!” he begged, drawing her to the nearest seat. “It can avail us nothing. How could I ever suppose that she . . . Get a light, Nelly,” he called sharply; “and prepare my grandmother for the news. I have not much time. I must go away again to-morrow.”

With trembling hands, Nelly brought

the lamp. Its clear flame shone full on her brother's pale face, as he stood motionless on the same spot, gazing vacantly before him, as one lost in thought.

"Army, my dear, my dear!" whispered his sister, sobbing, and throwing her tender little arms round him.

He stroked her hair with an absent, abstracted air.

"There is Grandmamma," she cried, and ran to meet the old lady.

"Armand?" said the latter, inquiringly, as she came in. "What is all this? I could not believe it when Sanna declared she had met you in the corridor. Where is Blanche? Where is the Colonel? What is the meaning of your coming alone?"

"It means," replied he slowly, emphasizing every syllable; "it means that

my betrothed this morning, shortly before I started to come here, graciously signified to me my dismissal. 'She does not love me,' she alleges, as the reason for her sudden determination, and God knows the reason is a cogent one." Again he laughed scornfully.

The old lady staggered and fell back, as though struck by a thunderbolt.

"It is not possible; it cannot be," she faltered.

"I said the same myself this morning, when the Colonel made the communication to me, and a hundred times since then I have stopped to ask myself if I have not taken leave of my senses, or some such thing; but no, it is a fact. The engagement between Blanche von Derenberg and myself is at an end."

"But, Army, had nothing gone before?" asked his mother, who was leaning back in her chair, utterly spent.

“You want to know what had gone before?” he answered in a cutting tone. “Why, the reading of the will. Blanche von Derenberg is sole legatee. She inherits the whole immense fortune—that is all. Why should she marry a man she does not love? But you may set your mind at rest, Granny”—he went a step nearer the old lady, who reeled and caught at the back of a chair for support. “Hers is a noble character. She divines that expenses have been brought on us by this engagement, and therefore she informed me through her father that she was ready to pay my debts *in toto*. It was a sop offered to the dismissed suitor, to the fool who had so blindly, madly loved this false creature.”

While speaking, he had been playing nervously with a crystal goblet, which

stood on the table, turning it incessantly round and round; now he took it up and dashed it to the ground. It fell with a crash, shivering into a thousand fragments, which danced far and wide over the old parqueted floor.

“Army!” implored his mother in faltering accents, stretching out her trembling hands towards the passionate youth.

But the old Baroness was herself again by this time. “We shall not submit to this,” she said vehemently, standing very erect. “Blanche inherits the fortune only on condition of your becoming her husband. I have a letter from my lady Stontheim . . .”

“Do you think,” asked Armand, as with two strides he covered the distance between them, and stood before her; “do you think I would ever look at

her again? She might go down on her knees now and implore me—I should thrust her from me, were I and you, all of you with me, starving. Not a penny will I take of her bounty! I would rather put a bullet through my head. Indeed, that would, perhaps, be the best thing for me to do. A bullet helped my father in his need, so Blanche informed me when I entreated her to make her home here with me at Derenberg. She was afraid, she declared, to live in this uncanny old nest, where the last owner had committed suicide. Ha, ha! Excellent reasons, to which no sensible person could take exception.” He spoke in a hoarse voice, and as one half distraught, and his dark eyes gleamed with a fierce, unnatural brightness.

“Mamma, mamma,” cried his young sister, piteously, “Army is ill—he does not know what he is saying.”

The pale lady rose from her seat, walked over to her son, and grasped his hand. She tried to speak, but her lips moved without producing a sound. She looked at him with an agonized supplicating look, as though she would say—"Spare me! Have I not suffered enough in my life?" He did not see that beseeching gaze. Impatiently he sought to free his hand from hers.

"Let me be, mother, let me be! I am not thinking of dying. I mean to live for all of you. Ah, I was forgetting. Here is a letter from the Colonel to the Baroness von Derenberg," he added, drawing an envelope from his breast-pocket, and throwing it on the table; "setting forth, no doubt, that all is for the best so, et cetera."

He passed his hands through his wavy dark hair, and walked up to the window.

Next minute he turned, and with a quick firm step left the room.

For a little while all was very quiet within. The paper rustled in the old Baroness's hands, as she stood reading the letter.

“See here, Cornelia, this is just what I was telling you to-day. ‘Another motive, which induces my daughter to ask to be released from her promise to your grandson, is that she was far from happy while at Derenberg, and never could feel at home there; you will excuse me from entering into full explanatory details. Why say unpleasant things to each other, now that all connection between us is coming to an end?’ You see,” broke off the old lady, angrily—“this is what you have done, you and Nelly. This is the consequence of your awkwardness in dealing with that spoilt

girl. Now you know what has come of it. Army has you to thank, and you alone, for the ruin of all his hopes. Oh, it is exasperating, it is enough to drive one wild, to find one's self thwarted by such stupidity, to be linked to people who own such pitiful, narrow views ! It has been the bane, the curse of my life ! ”

The old lady clenched her delicate hands, and cast looks of withering scorn over at the mother and daughter.

“ You have a right to scold me, Grand-mamma, if you like,” said Nelly, stepping forward protectingly before her mother, “ but leave mamma out of the question, please. You must not be angry at my speaking in this way ; I cannot help it. Mamma was always friendly to Blanche, and much more gentle and kind in her manner than you were. I never liked her, because I felt somehow she was only

marrying Army to please her aunt, and now I say Army ought to go down on his knees, and thank God that things are as they are. So pray don't distress mamma any more with unjust reproaches on that false, heartless creature's account. A girl who could insult my father's memory, and accuse him of taking his own life . . . Oh Heavens!" she broke off suddenly, and in a moment she was on the ground by her mother's side, trying to raise the unconscious lady in her arms.

"Oh, *cielo, cielo!*" murmured the Dowager. "What an existence, what a fearful existence!"

Midnight was long past, and still Nelly sat by her sick mother's bedside. She was the only one of the family who had retained her self-possession in this crisis, unshaken by this cruel reversal of fortune. She had put her exhausted mother to

.

bed, and had then gone about softly, doing away as much as possible with the preparations made for the reception of the bride-elect. She had stolen on tip-toe down the long corridor, and had listened at Armand's door. The sound of the young man's restless steps pacing incessantly up and down brought comfort to her little heart. And now she sat by her mother again, counting the quick, fevered pulse, and from time to time breathing a soft kiss on the thin hands which were so tightly clasped on the heaving bosom. The first grey glimmer of breaking day peeped through the curtains, warming gradually till it grew to be a faint rosy light. Nelly went up to the window, and looked down at the park below. The leaves on the trees, heavy with moisture, drooped sadly to the ground, which was crisp with a slight

hoar-frost. From the midst of the faded autumn foliage the red crest of a mountain ash shot up here and there, charming the eye with its brilliant dash of colour. Over the forest hovered a thin white cloud of mist, which enveloped the topmost boughs of the tall trees in a gauzy veil tinted pink by the rays of the rising sun. Weary from want of sleep, Nelly leaned her head against the panes, and closed her eyes. Suddenly she heard a noise behind her, the sound of a chair being pushed across the floor.

“Mamma!” she cried, as she turned round, and saw her mother throwing on one garment after another with feverish haste.

“I have slept so long, Nelly, and I have not said a word of comfort to poor Army yet. Why, it is morning now. No, let me be, I must go to him. He

must not lose his faith in mankind altogether—he is too young for that. Don't try to stop me, Nelly. He is not asleep. It is not so easy to sleep after such a blow as that."

She would hardly allow the girl to throw a shawl about her, before she hurried away through the parlour.

Her little daughter did not dare to follow her. She crept to the door of the next room, and listened. Presently she heard a scream, and, rushing out, she flew down the long corridor. The door of her brother's room was ajar. Her mother stood inside, supporting herself against the table.

At a glance Nelly took in all the details of the room. Yonder, the old four-post bedstead, with the pillows all crushed and disordered; on the table, a bottle of wine, half empty, and a glass;

over the sofa, a blank bare space—the picture which had filled it was standing with its face turned to the wall. There, on a chair just opposite lay the young man's epaulets and sword—but Army himself, where was Army?

“He is gone,” gasped the trembling lady. “He is gone, Nelly. Suppose, like his father, he were . . . he were to . . .”

“What, mamma, what? For God's sake, speak.”

“Suppose he . . . he . . . I . . . oh Father, have pity!” she stammered, unconnectedly. “Nelly, make haste, look for him. I am so weak, I cannot. Tell him he must stay with me. Once in my life I have borne that horrible trial—once is enough. I could not go through it a second time.”

“Mamma,” pleaded Nelly, in terrible suspense; “tell me what you mean?”

“Quick, quick! go then, make haste. He is not to die, he must live. Go, or they will be bringing him in to me all pale and covered with blood, like . . .” She shuddered, and pointed to the door.

The terrified girl understood her mother now, and a horrid fear seized her heart, settling on it as with the claws of a vulture. She sped away out of the room. Where, oh where, should she seek him first? Instinctively she ran downstairs. The turret door stood ajar. In headlong haste she flew across the open space, past the stone bears, on into the avenue. Her brother’s desperate look and manner, that terrible allusion to their father’s fate, recurred to her—a dreadful certainty shaped itself in her mind. She pressed her hand on her beating heart, and stood still a moment. Where could he be?

“Army!” she tried to cry, but she could hardly force the sound from her throat. “Army!” All around remained still as death.

Underfoot lay a soft wet carpet of withered leaves. Some little birds, twittering and fluttering in the boughs, looked down with their curious black eyes on the distressed young creature standing below. “Army!” she shouted, summoning all her strength, and followed up the shout with a long echoing cry, like a *jodel*. They had always used that call as children—he *must* hear her now.

No reply—only a whispering murmur through the old limes which shook their heads gently, as much as to say: he is not here! By the pond, perhaps! by the pond, she thought, and as she hurried through the thick bushes a hitherto unknown dread came upon her

in the stillness and solitude. How would it be when she found him? Suppose he could no longer hear when she called him. Suppose she were to find him all pale and covered with blood. A stifling oppression was upon her, but still she went on and on.

There lay the small dark piece of water, as quiet as though there were no storms, no tempests in the world. Broken bulrushes and dead leaves lay motionless on its still surface, and the stone seat on its bank was unoccupied. She drew a deep breath of relief, and walked hastily on. The drooping branches smote her in the face, and scattered their dew on her fair head. The hem of her dress, soaked through and through, trailed behind her as she went on and on, casting anxious glances to the right and left and from time to

time calling her brother's name through the still morning air. There . . . there were steps approaching! She fairly flew now. Yonder were the park gates, one of which stood open. She hurried through it into the road. A labourer passed, doffing his cap, and staring with astonishment at the unexpected apparition before him. Presently he stopped. She had made a gesture, as though she wished to speak to him, but as she remained silent, the man asked—

“Are you looking for something, my little lady?”

“Oh no, no. I was going out for a walk with my brother this morning. Have you seen him anywhere?”

“Do you mean the young officer gentleman? Yes, I met him just now down yonder, a bit of a way behind the rag-mill.”

“Thank you,” she panted, and took the road towards the Mill, hurrying on at full speed. There was the Ervings’ house glinting through the alders, there was the foot-bridge. She rushed onwards, past them both. They were all asleep still over at the house, no doubt—she must hasten on. Suddenly, oh horror! the sharp crack of a shot resounded through the air. With dreadful distinctness the report reached her ears. Instinctively seeking a support, she wound her arms round the nearest tree, and next minute sank to the ground in a dead faint. So she lay unconscious, not seeing the old woman who came hurrying over the bridge as fast as her legs would carry her, or the honest kindly face framed in a white cap which bent over the prostrate girl, not hearing the startled cry for assistance which

issued from those friendly lips. "Lord ha' mercy! it is Nelly, our Nelly! What can have happened to them up yonder again?"

CHAPTER II.

IN the family sitting-room of the Castle the dark curtains were closely drawn, and the place where the great old-fashioned sofa had stood was now occupied by a bed. Thereon lay Nelly's mother. She had been seized by a severe attack of illness on that unhappy morning when she had sought her son, and sought him in vain. Her feeble spirit still strove with the angel of Death, whose dread presence seemed to pervade the room. Incessantly the poor lady's delirious fancy travelled back to one dreadful day in the past when she had

been brought face to face with her husband's stiff and bloody corpse. Sometimes it would be himself she saw ; at others the victim would appear to her as her son, and then in piteous heart-rending accents she would beseech her Army not to die, not to forsake her also. She could not, could not live without him.

All was quite still now in the great room. A slender girlish figure flitted with noiseless steps over the old parqueted floor, smoothed the pillows with gentle hand and bent over the sufferer, listening to her low breathing when she seemed to sleep. For the second time Lizzie of the Mill was acting the part of a good Samaritan up at Castle Derenberg, and this was the tenth day she had spent here, keeping guard by the sick-bed. A certain shuddering awe would

creep over the young nurse, as she listened to the confused ravings which fell from the poor lady's lips, but she never shrank from her post, or relaxed aught of her unfailing care and tenderness. The days had been long and anxious, and the nights still longer and more terrible ; but to-day the fever had abated a little, so the doctor said, and the exhausted patient had at length fallen into a quiet sleep. Lizzie took a book from the table and sat down by the window where a narrow streak of light shone in between the curtains. She leaned her little head back against the chair-cushion, and closed her eyes. How strange it was that she should be sitting up here at the Castle, which she had thought never again to enter ! Old Aunty had awakened her in violent haste one morning, and told her to come down

to the parlour. There she had found Nelly lying on the sofa quite unconscious, all her clothes saturated with dew. What a fright it had given her! Hours had passed before they could restore the poor child to herself, and before this could be done, the parlour-door in her father's house had been thrown open, and *he* had appeared on the threshold. A great cry of surprise and terror had escaped her at sight of him—yes, of terror—for this man who so suddenly stood before her, with those lines of anguish about his mouth, with those fixed vacant-looking eyes, this man was not her Army, not the merry light-hearted comrade of old with the proud handsome features.

“Is my sister here?” he had asked, in a low voice. Then, catching sight of the white inanimate little figure on the

sofa, an expression of deep commiseration had flitted across his face.

What had come next? Auntie and he had spoken together in whispering tones, but to Lizzie each word had been audible. His mother had been taken very ill, he said. He wanted help. Sanna was so awkward, and his grandmother complained of a headache, and now here was Nelly ill, too—poor little Nelly!

“I will go with you,” Lizzie had declared; and in profound silence she had walked by his side that chill autumnal morning. Not a word had he then spoken to her, and since then not a word in her hearing had passed his lips, though he would often enter the sick room softly, and draw back the bed-curtains to look at his mother.

And Lizzie knew now why he was so sombre and silent. The sparkling en-

gaged ring was missing from his hand; and the poor patient, in her delirium, babbled openly of the untoward event which had befallen. Oh, that beautiful, false creature! How Lizzie hated her! Nelly had been right indeed in declaring "she does not love him." Ah! if she dared but say a few comforting words to him!

The door of the sick-room was gently opened, and Nelly came in.

"How quietly she is sleeping!" whispered the little girl, with a glance at the invalid, sitting down on the stool at her friend's feet as she spoke. "Thank God! the doctor thinks the danger is over now. Oh, Lizzie, how happy I am to think of it! The hope makes me feel quite strong again myself. I shall stay here, and you shall go and have a good night yourself, you darling!"

“No, Nelly, you are to go to bed. No resistance! The doctor will not hear of your sitting up on any account. By-and-by you must put a shawl round you, and go out a little into the open air. Your brother will gladly go with you, I am sure.”

Nelly shook her head sadly. “Oh, yes, he will go; but, Lizzie, you don’t know how terrible it is to be alone with him. He walks along by me so gloomily, and then suddenly he will begin to whistle quite a lively tune, just as if he were out of his mind. Ah! I am best here with you, Lizzie. But for you and Aunty, and your good mother who is always providing and caring for us, we should be in a bad way up here.”

“Don’t Nelly,” whispered the other, blushing, and put her hand over her friend’s mouth.

While the two girls were exchanging these words in the sick lady's room, the old Baroness sat upstairs in a deep reverie.

"It must be done some time," said she at length, half aloud. "I must speak to him, whatever may come of it." She rose and rang the bell. "Let my grandson know I wish to see him," she ordered, in a short, ungracious manner, as Sanna entered. Then she went back to her seat again.

But a faint light stole in through the red curtains, for the sky without was obscured by heavy clouds, and a sharp autumnal wind swept the leaves from the trees in a continuous shower. A wood fire was blazing on the hearth, casting bright streaks of light on the crimson seats and hangings. The reflection of those fiery tongues gave back

to the faded colours something of their old rich purple glow. Moodily the old Baroness sat, gazing at the busy flames.

“Come in,” she cried, as a quick knock was heard at the door.

Armand entered with a courteous bow. He did not take the seat the old lady assigned to him by a wave of the hand, but remained standing behind it.

“I was just going to ask for an interview, Granny,” said he. “My mother is better. I shall go.”

“Will you be able to remain in the service?” asked the old Baroness, in a low voice.

He looked down gloomily. “I don’t know, he said, after a minute’s pause. “It will depend just now on the humour my creditors may be in. Directly the news of my marriage having fallen

through gets wind, they will be down upon me like a pack of bloodhounds, of course. The matter will be brought to the knowledge of the regiment. The Colonel will ask, 'Can you pay or not?' and then the end will be at hand. My fate will overtake me, as it has overtaken so many before me."

The old lady listened tranquilly, as though he were telling of some party of pleasure.

"Hellwig must find some means of help," she said, resolutely.

"Hellwig? Yes, if he could make money out of stones. Not long ago he declared to me that it was impossible to raise the sum of two hundred thalers which I had to pay the carriage-builder at a stated time. The fellow said he would wait until I . . . well, until the end of October," he substituted, shortly.

“Oh, they were all of them so willing to wait. There was no hurry—oh dear no, none at all! Was I not own nephew to the Countess Stontheim, and about to marry the Countess’s niece?”

“How much do your debts amount to altogether?” asked his grandmother.

He parried the question. “What does it signify?” he said impatiently. “They cannot be paid, and so . . .”

A long pause followed, during which Armand examined with much apparent interest one of the Italian landscapes in the gold frames. The wind had risen to a hurricane; it howled in the chimney, and scattered sparks over the faded carpet and on the black merino dress of the old lady sitting opposite.

“Army, there is but one way to save both yourself and me.”

He turned slowly round, and looked at her inquiringly.

“You must make some other rich marriage as quickly as possible.”

“How, Granny?”

“There are plenty of girls, wealthy, good-looking girls, who are ready to buy a husband, as people say.”

“Ah! yes, I understand,” he replied carelessly.

“Reflect, Army. It is not your own living that alone depends on it. All our fortunes are at stake.”

“Have you anything else to say to me?” he asked, in a tone which imposed silence on the old lady. “Nothing? Then you will allow me to take my leave. I must see how they are going on downstairs.” He bowed again, and went out.

Half mechanically he turned his steps towards the sick-room. In the ante-chamber he stopped. It seemed to him

that he heard whispering voices within. He walked to the window, and leaned his head against the panes.

The words his grandmother had spoken to him had fallen like so many corrosive drops into the fresh wound he bore in his heart. The fierce pain of it drove the blood to his cheeks. A fascinating, seductive vision hovered constantly about his path, staying by him in spite of all his efforts to scare and chase it away. Again he saw her as she had appeared to him on that last day, after the reading of the will, when a subdued quiet had settled down on the elegantly appointed villa. The swarm of visitors had dispersed. His uncle had dozed off after dinner in the adjoining room, and he was left alone with her—for the first time for many weeks. How beautiful she had looked in her deep mourning,

the golden flood of hair confined by a snood of black ribbon! She lay back in her chair, musing dreamily, as it were, while he talked to her. He spoke of his love, of his longing to possess her, of the felicity which filled his heart. Had she heard him? he wondered. The look she turned on him, as he took her hand, pierced him through and through like cold steel, called up in him a first vague, terrible presentiment of what was coming. Suddenly she had risen from her seat, cutting short the conversation, and had passed from his sight through the curtains which guarded the door. Once again he had beheld the wonderful gleam of her bright hair, as the draught of air caused by the opening of the door lifted the *portières* behind her. Then she was gone, and he was left alone with his aching, over-charged heart.

She had never loved him, she sent him word—never. She had only engaged herself to him to please her aunt. And yet those yellow leaves, now whirling tumultuously down the avenue, had heard her swear fidelity to him, had heard the assurance, a thousand times repeated, that she loved him, that he was more to her than all else in the world. And now, all this was past. He was to sell himself—to sell himself, so his grandmother advised. “No, the bullet rather—the bullet would help him best.”

He groaned and ground his teeth. What had become of the good fortune on which he had so proudly reckoned? The old legend occurred to his mind—

“Let God be thy stay,
Luck may come any day.”

Absurd, was it not, to think how soon it had left him?

A light step sounded behind him. He turned ; a gentle face, all suffused with blushes looked up at him. "Your mamma is asking for you," said a clear voice, very softly. He walked past Lizzie into the sick-room, and she went up to the window where he had been standing. Outside there was a continuous drizzle of fine rain, and the country was shrouded in a veil of moisture.

She tried to distinguish her father's house at the foot of the hill, but the clouds of vapour shut it out from view. What were they doing down yonder? she wondered. "My good little mother, and father, and Aunty. Father is out shooting, I dare say. But no, he has so much to do in the office now, since Herr Sell-dorf went away so suddenly." Again a deep blush overspread her face.

In the next room all was very still.

The door had been left ajar. Armand, no doubt, was kneeling by his mother's bedside. She could hear his voice now, saying, "Poor little mother, you thought I was going to emulate the Lord of Streitwitz, did not you? No, no, I have you still, you know, you and Nelly." His voice was tender and cheering, and yet there was a sound in it as of tears repressed which made his speech a little indistinct. Then came an answer in his mother's weak tones. Lizzie could not hear what was said, but she felt that those gentle faltering accents breathed of sweet sympathy and solace, told of the sufferer's joy and thankfulness at holding her son in her arms once more. Those words, she knew, sprang from the unutterable fulness of a mother's love which sought to help, support, and counsel. It was a soothing tranquillizing murmur, as

though a sick child were being lulled to peaceful slumber.

Then, suddenly,—could it be?—there came a sound of weeping, of sobs quickly repressed by a great effort. Was it Army? Lizzie veered round, and listened with a blanched face. Do men weep, too? thought the startled girl. She hurried to the door, bent on flight. He must not know that she had been by and heard him. At that very instant he came out of his mother's room. His face was grave, and his lips were firmly set, but the eyes—ah, yes, they were still moist with the tears he had shed for his lost bride.

She stood before him with her hands folded on her bosom, as though she would entreat his pardon for beholding him thus. He glanced at her, and read her heartfelt sympathy in her eyes. Did the

remembrance of the old days come back to him, of a time when this little maiden had so often played the part of comforter, drying the tears which the impetuous boy shed in fits of impatience or childish wrath? "Lizzie," he said, softly and gratefully, holding out his hand to her.

"Army, dear Army!" she whispered, in a voice quite stifled by sobs. For a moment he felt a little hand in his; then she vanished from his sight.

CHAPTER III.

THE old monotonous life had set in again at Castle Derenberg. Armand had left, and all was very still in the old mansion. Grim care stalked supreme through the desolate rooms, and there was no one now to resist its sway.

“You must come to our assistance, Hellwig,” the old Baroness had declared to her trusty friend and helper in need. “You must, indeed. Only procure us the money for a short time, so that my grandson may tide over the storm. We will settle it all afterwards. Time brings counsel.” With a heavy heart, the old

man had promised that he would do what he could "to help that young rascal, Army, out of his scrape," and had then proceeded to inquire what plans her ladyship might have for the settling in the future of which she spoke. When, in her quick, nervous way, she had hinted her views to this tried friend of the family, he had smiled almost sadly. "What, try the dangerous experiment a second time? God grant the next essay may succeed better than the first. But, my lady, these things are not so easy now-a-days as you imagine. The world has grown most unpleasantly practical of late. Fathers who are ready to receive a noble young prodigal with open arms, and who consider it an honour to pay his colossal debts, grow scarcer day by day. Money is tight, Baroness, very tight. But what folly, my dear lady, to go to such expense!

Who would have thought of ordering carriages for the young lady, or running up such upholsterers' bills? There would have been plenty of time for that months hence. You should never sell your bear-skin before you have killed your bear. You, my lady, who have had such experience of life, should have taken the young fellow by the ear, and shown him the way he should go. He is one whom it is easy to lead."

The younger Baroness, who was present at the interview, at this had cast a reproachful glance at her mother-in-law, and then looked beseechingly at the old man who was their only hope and refuge. Her beseeching eyes had so far prevailed with him, that he had promised he would do all in his power to help them in their pressing need.

Lizzie had long ago returned to her

parents' house, taking with her the warm and grateful thanks of Nelly and her mother. She came almost daily to the Castle, and her merry chatter, her bright kindly face, brought sunshine to the great, grave, lofty rooms. For a short time, Nelly would forget her sadness, only, however, to feel herself doubly wretched afterwards.

“What a happy time she has of it!” thought the poor little girl, watching the slender figure of her friend, hurrying homewards down the avenue, where the limes now stood gaunt and bare. Nelly pictured to herself the comfortable home at the Mill; in imagination, she could see Lizzie wind her arms caressingly round the handsome master's neck, and hear her call him her dear darling father, of whom she was so proud, so justly proud. Then the poor child's eyes overflowed with

tears again, so grievous and bitter was her sorrow.

November had come round again with its dark gloomy weather. Storms raged about the old Castle, as they had raged and roared for centuries past. Heavy clouds, laden with moisture, overhung the landscape, and rain, mingled with snow, pattered against the window-panes. Such weather has its influence over the human heart, especially when the heart is sick, and in sore need of cheering. Involuntarily the question forces itself to the lips: "Will the sun ever shine again? will the storms ever pass?" Well for the souls of poor suffering mortals that hope is theirs, even in the days that are hardest! Hope breathes words of comfort to the half-despairing breast, paints on the black storm-charged background shining arabesques and graceful flower-

wreaths, between which appear delightful pictures of the happy future that yet may be! Then the tearful eyes grow clearer, and the oppressed heart beats with renewed vigour. All may come right even yet!

So time went on, slow, monotonous, leaden-footed. Every week brought a letter from the absent son, which the mother opened with a secret fear and a quickened pulse, dreading lest it might contain ill news.

“See how unhappy he is, mamma; so crushed and unlike himself!” Nelly would sigh as she read the letter over and over again. Brief as it was, the depression of the writer showed plainly through its lines.

“He is well,” the old Baroness would say contemptuously, “and he hopes we are the same. His service keeps him

very busy, *voilà tout*. He is no man, or he would risk anything rather than let matters come to the worst. Good heavens ! if I were in his place, so young, with all my life before me ! Oh, this unfortunate German sentimentality of yours, which goes on grieving for a lost prize, and robs you of courage to strive for a new ! *Orribile !* It is the ruin of you all. I never should have thought that he would be a craven too !” And, trembling with excitement, the old lady would sit down and pen a letter to her grandson, stimulating him to fresh hope and courage, and another to Hellwig, spurring him on in his efforts to delay payment of the debts as long as possible.

November passed, giving place to fierce December, with its storms and hurricanes. The wind howled in the tall chimneys, and turned the rusty weather-vanes on

the towers with a grating, grinding sound. It bowed and shook the old trees in the forest. The rain pattered on still against the windows, and soaked the alleys in the park until they became a veritable slough of despond. Then, suddenly, a sparkling, starry winter-night arrived with its ringing frost. In a trice the muddy paths grew smooth and firm as the high-road; a mirror-like sheet of ice covered the pond, and over hill and dale some fairy's hand scattered the first feathery flakes of snow.

"Christmas will be here soon," said the people of the village, rejoicing at the thought.

"We shall have Christmas soon, mamma," said Nelly to the pale, fragile-looking lady who sat knitting by the fire; but in the girl's face there was little of the anticipatory delight with which the

happy festival is usually greeted. "Will Army come, I wonder?" she added inquiringly, and, putting her arms about her mother's neck, pleaded, "Dear mamma, I don't want any present at all, if only Army may be allowed to come."

"Christmas will be here soon," exulted Lizzie, when she saw the glistening sheet of snow spread over the earth. There was such a joyous ring in her voice, that old Aunty, to whom she spoke, looked up at her almost in amazement. The girl was fairly metamorphosed. The old petulant gaiety, which suited her so well, had broken forth anew, the old merriment danced in her bonnie blue eyes. Her cheeks were as rosy as in former years; and all this wonderful change had become apparent when she—yes, when she returned from the Castle. She would jest and joke with her father now as of

old, and practise all sorts of small roguish tricks, which made even her mother laugh heartily.

And now Christmas was indeed at hand. When the old woman looked at her darling with a certain air of scrutiny, the little mouth would be pressed to her ear, and of all the whispered babble she would make out something about the Christ-child, and Christmas-trees, and Christmas work. A hint would be given of some beautiful thing in course of preparation for her, of the merits and excellence of which she could form no conception!

And all this jubilation, this happiness, had been produced in an instant, by the magic of the single word "Lizzie!" spoken in a soft, grateful tone—by one fleeting grasp of a friendly hand.

At length the holy eve arrived, bring-

ing to every house a ray of pure celestial light, kindling the candles on the green trees in palace and cottage, irradiating happy faces, and disclosing all the gifts, some modest, some splendid, which loving hands had prepared for the occasion. The church bells rang out into the clear still air, inviting all men to thanksgiving; and high over the happy world arched the deep blue vault of heaven, all sparkling and gleaming with its wealth of stars. "Glory to God in the highest"—the old anthem was borne up to them—"and on earth peace and good will to mankind."

Peace on earth! Alas, there are dwellings where that gentle guest finds no admittance, where care and bitter sorrow guard the door, hearts so heavily weighted that they cannot share in the happiness of the hour. How many such

are there, must there ever be! And at no time does a poor, hardly-pressed mortal feel his burden heavier, his grief more poignant, than at this season when all about him are rejoicing, when the sweet message of peace is borne home to every heart save his. Hard is it to escape the sad question "Why am I—why are I and mine alone shut out from the general joy and gladness?"

This mute question was in Nelly's eyes, as she stood looking out into the partial darkness of that starry night. "All the windows are ablaze down at the Mill. The Christmas tree is lighted up now," she whispered to herself, and pressed her hands to her bosom with a sob of childish pain. What a longing came over her for a sight of its brilliant, illuminated branches. Lizzie had begged and entreated her to come, if only just

to see the effect when it was lighted up. But no, why should she go? What was the Ervings' Christmas tree to her? She could not have one of her own, and why should she make her sorrow greater by looking into Lizzie's happy face? Her gloomy quiet home would only seem sadder by the contrast. She turned away, and went up to her mother's chair that she might nestle her cheek against the dear face. She felt with her hand and found the chair was empty.

"Mamma!" she called softly. All was still. "Ah, she has gone away too, up to grandmamma," whispered poor Nelly, sinking down on the soft cushions. "They all leave me alone. How I wish they would come back! Mamma, at least, and Army—ah, yes, Army is there." There was certainly comfort in that thought. To-morrow he would be more

at liberty, he could not possibly have so much business to talk over with grand-mamma. What important matter could it be that they had been discussing ever since his arrival? Was it about Blanche still? she wondered.

Nelly was mistaken. Her mother was not upstairs. She took no part in the conference then being held between the Dowager and the young officer—a conference wherein ugly and most un-Christmas-like subjects were started and canvassed.

“At the New Year? Only a week hence?” said the old lady in a low voice, frowning as she spoke.

“At the New Year,” assented Armand, who was standing before her.

“And you say Hellwig can do nothing?”

“So he sends me word.”

“But, *Dio mio!* it is not so difficult, as a rule, for an officer to find money.”

“As a rule? You forget, Granny, that our position is very well known. No banker will lend me money with the certain prospect of losing it, especially in such large sums as I require. The only favour I have been able to obtain is a respite until the New Year.”

“And you have not once endeavoured to adopt the course I pointed out to you as your only hope and means of succour?”

He looked over at her defiantly. “No; my creditors give me the same advice. They are even willing to help me in the matter, but I would a thousand times rather emigrate to America, and earn my living as a labourer than submit to such a yoke.”

“As you like,” said the old lady, dryly.

“It is your concern, not mine.”

“You are quite right there,” he said, with a laugh; “but deuce take the whole

business. I have not come here to complain and lament. I have come to keep Christmas with you. Christmas!" he repeated ironically. •

"Well, then, I will try and see if I cannot do something myself," declared his grandmother. "There are still people in the world who have not forgotten the name of Derenberg. To-morrow, no, this very night, I will write to the Duke of R——."

Armand's lip curled with a bitter smile. He thought of the picture up in the portrait-gallery, where his grandmother appeared as the proud young Châtelaine welcoming the Duke to her hospitable roof. "We are to go begging now," said a disdainful voice within him. He passed his hand across his brow, and looked at the tall black figure opposite, standing motionless before the table with

an air of indomitable resolution. He was sorry for the proud woman; he knew how unutterably hard it would be to her to write such a letter.

“Don’t do that, Granny,” he begged, gently. “You must not humiliate yourself in that manner.”

“Yes, I must do it, for I see I am the one person who may yet possibly find some means of rescue, though I am but an old woman.”

“But, Granny, will the old Duke remember you?”

She laughed. “Will you ever forget the face of your first love?” she asked, and her eyes fairly blazed, as she turned them on him. “Most assuredly not. Well, just as little will the Duke of R—— forget Leonora von Derenberg, for he fell in love with me, Army, the very first time he set eyes on me. He

was then only Hereditary Prince. A great *fête* was given at the Court, I do not remember on what occasion. On that day, as I advanced, leaning on your grandfather's arm, the gay crowd, which filled the brilliantly lighted rooms, fell back, and all eyes were turned on the stranger, the Italian, as I made my reverence before the ducal pair, who had expressed a wish to see me. Just then a faint exclamation of surprise struck on my ear. I raised my eyes, and met those of a handsome young man, who was fixedly looking at me with an ardent admiring gaze. I was seventeen years old then, Army, and what can be more intoxicating to a woman than such homage as this? Well, it is all over now and done with," she murmured. "Why call up the past from its grave? Then . . ." she continued

dreamily, without a glance at the flushed face of her listener, "he often came to Derenberg. He was always at my side, my faithful cavalier, until one day they sent him abroad to travel for a time. The good people, his parents, had grown anxious about him, and my husband chose to act the part of the most absurd Othello the world ever saw. He hated the gay lively Prince, because I grew merry when he talked to me, and my eyes sparkled when I saw him, a trick they had almost lost in those days. Everything about me bore the same stamp of wearisome, indescribable dullness!—the country, the people, even the parties which my husband got up for my amusement. He, in conjunction with the princely parents, banished the butterfly, who would circle so giddily about the lighted candle. The notion

was narrow, commonplace, like all else in this country. I knew who had drawn my husband's attention to the matter and suggested to him the worst view of what was really a perfectly harmless intercourse. Oh, how I hated that brother-in-law of mine, that . . ."

"Granny! And you were thinking of writing to this man, to beg of him, because he once admired you—of him whom my grandfather hated."

"I am an old woman now, my boy, and responsible to myself alone for my actions," she replied proudly, with a toss of the still beautiful head. "When poverty came upon us, twenty years ago, he wrote to me. He had not forgotten the woman who had captivated his young heart. I had but to take one step to rescue us from the wretched situation in which we were placed; but I knew

what I owed to the name of Derenberg, and what I owed to myself." She stood before her grandson with her hand upraised, and her great eyes flashed with noble pride.

"Do you think it will be easy to me to write to him?" she went on. "I do it for your sake, Army; for I see that your hand is paralysed by the first stroke of trouble that has fallen upon you. It has made of you a feeble dreamer, instead of a man, energetic and strong of purpose—so let me act in your place." She walked past him, and disappeared, passing into the adjoining room. The door crashed noisily to on its hinges, and the crimson curtains fluttered and blew about with the quick, sudden draught.

Armand remained almost motionless, standing by the fireplace. Every now and then he gave his head a little shake,

and a bitter smile played about his mouth. Suddenly a change came over him. He seemed to shake off the attitude of drooping depression, and mentally to draw himself erect; it was as though an idea had flashed upon him, a resolution, which he . . .

“Army,” cried a soft voice, and the blonde head of his little sister appeared through the folds of the red *portières*. “Army, come downstairs. Quick! Mamma has sent me.” She had crept noiselessly into the room now, and was nestling close to him. “Do you know what I think?” she whispered. “I believe mamma has been lighting up a fir-tree for us. There is such a bright gleam through the chink of the door.” He looked down into the blue eyes, which were raised to him in such childish joy. “Do make haste,” she begged.

“Grandmamma will not want to come. She does not care for any of our German fir-trees.”

“Yes, come, Nelly,” he said, and putting his arm round his sister, he drew her hurriedly from the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was growing dusk, and Lizzie was busily engaged up in her own room, packing a pretty little basket with sweetmeats and dainties. There was always something fresh to be added, something especially nice which must not be forgotten; but, at last, she shut to the lid, which fairly burst with the undue pressure, and a little murmur of satisfaction escaped her rosy lips. "There, there is hardly anything in it but marchpane and chocolate—that is what she likes best." Then she began to sing as she drew on a fur-lined jacket, which had

lain under the Christmas-tree the evening before, and set the little black velvet cap, bordered with sable to match, jauntily on the top of her brown plaits. She looked at herself in the glass, and began to laugh.

“Just like a boy! Aunty is quite right,” said she, setting the coquettish headgear a little straighter to the middle of the forehead, with a pat to keep it firmly in its place.

“Now for the muff, and then off at full speed, so as to be home again in good time.” She caught up her muff and little basket, and sprang down the stairs. “I am going to see Nelly,” she called into the parlour, opening the door a little as she passed.

“Be sure and be back in good time, Lily,” exhorted her mother, “or uncle will be vexed, and the children will grow

impatient. You know the Christmas-tree is to be lighted up for them at seven o'clock."

"Yes, yes; I'll be sure to be here," cried Lizzie, and off she ran.

Old Aunty looked after her as she crossed the Mill bridge. "Deary me!" she said, "I wonder how things will look up at the Castle to-night. Father Christmas won't have paid them much of a visit, I am thinking."

Lizzie had been sitting a full quarter of an hour chattering with Nelly. Reclining in an armchair opposite them lay Armand. He was busy with his thoughts, and only roused up to listen occasionally when a merry laugh from one of the girls awoke him from his brooding.

"And mother got a pill-box from father," Lizzie was recounting. "On it was written 'the best medicine,' and

inside there was the money to take her to Italy. You know, Nelly, the doctor always told mamma she should not stay here through the winter; but she has struggled against it with all her might. Now she has more than half given way."

"But she would not go alone?" asked Nelly.

"No; in any case papa would go with her, and perhaps . . ."

"Well, perhaps what?"

"Perhaps I might go too," added Lizzie, hesitatingly.

"And you are not delighted?" cried Nelly, all excitement. "Oh, fancy going to Italy! How beautiful, how lovely it must be there!"

"I would rather stay here with Aunt. I am quite well, and it can't be more lovely or beautiful anywhere than it is here at home."

“Oh, you silly thing!” chided Nelly.

“No, you must not think me silly, Nelly. You see, I have another reason; but you must promise not to betray me, for I have not said a word to father. Well, there is Bertha, the daughter of our chief inspector over at the Mill, she is in a consumption, you know. The doctor says nothing but a stay in some milder place, like Vevey or Montreux, can save her. She is much worse than mamma, and, if possible, I want Bertha to go in my stead. I am young still, and no doubt I shall have another chance of seeing ‘*la bella Italia*,’ as your grand-mamma would say.”

Armand rose suddenly and walked to the window. The girls had spoken in a low murmur, but every syllable had reached his ear. She was just the same as ever! the same old good-hearted Lizzie,

who would share her bread-and-butter with the poor children, or bestow all the bright copper coins Aunty had so carefully collected for her on the first tramp who came in her way; and she shook her head just in the old half defiant, half shame-faced fashion on being scolded. Another image rose before him—a small, slight figure with a cloud of gleaming red hair. *She* retreated with a shudder from beggars, and at a sign from her hand “those creatures” were unmercifully driven from the door. One day, when out walking, a cripple had stretched out his hand to her. She had drawn her dress about her with an expression of disgust. “Don’t give him anything, Army,” she had said imperiously. “It makes me feel quite sick. Come away, come away. Aunt gives far too liberally to the poor-box as it is.” And so she

had hurried past the poor wretch, holding her perfumed, lace-trimmed handkerchief to her face.

Without, the park lay snowy white and peaceful, every tree distinctly standing out from the clear back-ground, while down in the hollow the lights could be seen gleaming in the windows at the Mill. The familiar old place! How cheery and pleasant he remembered it! How smoothly life went on in that retired nook! No anxiety about the future; no fear of coming pressure and need!

“From my childhood’s days, from my childhood’s
days,
Rings ever an old familiar rhyme.
How far from me, how lost to me,
Is that which once was mine!”

The words were borne over to him in soft, thrilling tones. He turned. There at the old harpsichord stood the slender,

yet well-built, girlish figure, the little head bent slightly forward. Even in the faint light shed by the lamp into that distant corner Army fancied he could detect a delicate flush mantling to Lizzie's cheek.

“When I bade farewell, when I bade farewell,
Friends were many, and hope was great;
When I homeward came, when I homeward came,
All was empty and desolate.”

Lizzie's voice thrilled with deep emotion.

“Now the last verse,” begged Nelly.
“Mamma is so fond of it.”

“I can't sing any more,” she replied softly, and turned back to her former seat again.

“Oh, what a pity, Lizzie!” said Nelly's mother, joining in. “What, not even a carol?”

She went back to the piano at once.

“Brightly sparkling high in Heaven,
A star beams down on earth,
And holy angels sing, rejoicing
Over our Saviour's birth.

“ And round the humble manger shines
A marvellous great light ;
There, on the harsh straw, a baby lies,
Its face divinely bright.

“ Oh, let us bless the happy hour,
When peace to us was given,
When, with that gracious smiling child,
Joy came to us from Heaven.

“ Oh, men and women, children, all,
Give thanks on bended knee,
For Jesus, our Lord, to us is given,
The Light of the World to be.”

The last tones of the old carol died away in the lofty chamber. All was very still. To each present the song had recalled old memories, differing in kind, but having all one common root and origin.

The invalid lady sitting there was thinking of the time when she, a young mother, had, with persevering efforts, taught her little son those words, that he might repeat them to his father. A certain scene rose before her again. The

noble boy stood encircled by her arms before a handsome man, her husband. She, kneeling by the child's side, had folded his little hands devoutly. The lights sparkling among the branches of the Christmas tree were brightly reflected in the candid young eyes. Yes, she felt he must be proud of his son. "Now, say your hymn, my boy!" and the clear childish voice had spoken with touching earnestness.

"Oh, let us bless the happy hour,
When peace to us was given."

The young man was not thinking of that evening. It had altogether faded from his memory. In fancy he saw himself in old Aunty's room down at the Mill. Two little girls were there too, sitting on a stool at the old woman's feet, their rosy mouths wide open, their eyes earnestly fixed on space, as they sang, with no

great art, it is true, but valiantly, all glowing with the right joyful Christmas spirit—

“Round the humble manger shines
A marvellous great light,
There, on the harsh straw a baby lies——”

“Army is not singing with us, Aunt,” breaks off the elder girl, looking up at the old woman inquiringly.

“Then he won’t have any ginger-bread by-and-by, when Goodman Rupert comes,” is the answer. Upon which the little one, tripping up to him, begs, with tears in her eyes, “Army, sing with us, sing, too!” and as he shakes his curly dark head defiantly, she covers her face with her small hands in grief.

Then in comes Goodman Rupert, wrapped in a great rough fur cloak, rattling nuts in a big bag. He draws a rod from under his arm, with a fierce,

threatening look around. "Are the children good, Aunty? Can they say their prayers?" he asks in a hollow voice.

"Ah, yes, the girlies can, but that fellow there, is a wicked young Turk, who will not sing his carol! You may take him away with you to your great snow-cave, Sir Rupert." At this the little girl breaks into loud weeping, and, forgetting her fear, runs over to the much-dreaded visitor.

"No, no, good Uncle Rupert, don't take Army away, he is not naughty. I don't want any ginger-bread, either." Then Nelly joins in the despairing cry, and finally Goodman Rupert has to depart without hearing a hymn, Aunty's comforting tones and the children's sobs sounding after him as he goes. But the wicked boy does not cry. He laughs, as the flap of the fur cloak disappears, and

declares saucily that it was not Man Rupert at all, but only Peter the coachman, dressed up in the master's fur pelisse turned inside out.

All these childish reminiscences flowed back upon Army, and involuntarily his lips framed the question, "Do you remember . . . ?" Then he paused, startled by the sound of his own words which had echoed so loudly through the quiet room. They were all gone and forgotten long ago, these babyish fancies. He was a man now. A man?—no, but a weak, faint-hearted dreamer, whose strength had been paralysed by the first stroke of misfortune. Upstairs, an old lady sat writing for his sake, to rescue him from ruin, a letter which would perhaps be the hardest, the most painful, she had ever penned in her whole life; and this she was doing precisely because he himself was not made of manly stuff.

“I must be going home,” said Lizzie, taking up her fur jacket from a chair.

“Oh, won’t you stay with us this evening?” asked Nelly.

“Thank you, I am sorry I cannot. The pastor’s children are all coming for their Christmas gifts, and you know it would not do for me to be away.”

“Ah, true; but come again soon.”

“Certainly.”

“Will you let me escort you?” This, suddenly, in Army’s voice.

“Oh, no, thank you,” she stammered in confusion.

“This is a general holiday; you might meet some drunken fellow,” he interrupted her, taking up his cap and sword.

A wonderful evening it was which had closed in over the Christmas earth. Not a breath stirred. The world without lay in unbroken stillness, wrapped in a

shining, fleckless snow-mantle, vaulted over by a deep blue sky from which millions of stars sparkled down through the clear, cold air. Below yonder, in the village, the bright windows gleamed from beneath the snow-covered roofs, and on the hill, at the cross-roads, close by the old stone seat, stood a slender, youthful pair. In petrified surprise, as it were, the old lime-tree spread its leafless branches over their heads, as though to hide them away, and screen them from every eye. "Is this a time for love-making?" every bare twig seemed to say; "now, when the nightingales are silent, when no green foliage can whisper back its greeting?"

And yet . . . The girl's head lay so peacefully on his breast, and in the blue eyes shone a perfect heaven of love and bliss.

“I am to help to make life less sombre to you, Army. Really? I?”

“If you will, Lizzie,” he replied in a low voice, and kissed her on the forehead.

“If I will?” she repeated, with glowing cheeks, and nestled more closely to him. “Will I take the happiness that is offered me?”

How had it all come about? How strange she felt as she walked back alone over the foot-bridge! As in a dream, his earnest words sounded in her ear; she felt the kiss on her forehead burning like fire, and yet it was all real, a reality she had lived through, which made her heart beat so high in her bosom. And to-morrow!—the beating heart suddenly stood still, as she saw the lighted windows of her home. To-morrow he would come to her father.

She was engaged, a happy affianced bride, *his* affianced!

She stopped and looked back. Yonder he must be going now, up the hill, past the solitary old lime-tree, which, in spite of snow and ice, had seen so fair a blossoming of happiness to-day. He was fond of her, really fond! She shook her head over this strange thing, this most unhopèd-for wonder. And her parents and old Auntie . . . would they see from her look that something had happened? . . . No, no, not yet; she would wait until the pastor's family was gone. Then she would whisper to her father that to-morrow some one would come . . . some one . . .

She had reached the house-door. The old bell rang out with such a terrible clang this evening, just when she wanted to pass in unnoticed and go up to her

room. No, it would not do. Old Auntie raised a curtain from the window next the door, and then quickly opened the latter.

“Oh, you little truant!” cried the kindly old voice; “I was just going to send Dolly after you. We began to think some one had run away with you.”

“Good evening,” she replied faintly. The beating of her heart was so great she could hardly command her voice. “Is it really so late?”

“I should think so,” said the old woman, closing the parlour door behind her.

Herr Erving was sitting at the round table, and her mother was beside the pastor on the sofa.

“Ah, so there you are, little woman!” cried her father cheerily, drawing the slender figure to him. “Well, what do

you think, Lizzie? The pastor's children have caught the scarlatina and cannot come up for their Christmas gifts. Isn't it a pity?"

"A sad pity!" she repeated; but her eyes shone with a wonderful lustre, and such a happy smile played about the corners of her mouth. The smile was altogether out of unison with her words. At any other time she would have broken forth into fervent expressions of regret; but to-day she hardly comprehended the sense of what was said to her. "Let me go one minute. I will just take my things off upstairs, and come down again directly," and away she ran.

"What is the matter with the child?" asked Frau Erving anxiously.

But the child had fled to her own little room, and stood there, panting with a sense of relief. The fur jacket and cap

were dashed on to the nearest chair. Then she sank on her knees by the bedside, as was her habit at night when she said her evening prayer. She pressed her burning brow among the pillows, and folded her hands, but no words passed her lips. Her heart was thrilling with a confused thanksgiving, a nameless dread, a sense of infinite happiness. At length she sprang up, and opened the window. "There, over there!" she whispered, and waved her hand as though he could see her. "Was he thinking of her now? Had he confessed to his mother that he had taken childish little Lizzie of the Mill into his arms and kissed her? And Nelly, what would Nelly say?"

"Lizzie, Lizzie!" they called from below.

"I am coming," she answered, with almost a jubilant shout.

She took the light and went up to the glass. A pair of glowing eyes met her, intense in expression, and deepened in hue. "His wife!" she murmured. "His promised wife!" and a great flush overspread her face. Quickly she put out the candle, and ran downstairs.

"They are all in the dining-room, Miss," cried Dolly to her, and then suddenly gave a great scream. "Lord ha' mercy, Miss! there be a wedding a-coming; there be the bride in the house unbeknown to us all. Just look! one, two, three lights all together."

The young girl, who was just turning the handle of the dining-room door, looked round at this, and blushed bright scarlet. True enough, there stood Dolly with the kitchen candle; yonder against the wall hung the green lacquered hall lamp, and old Aunty, stepping out of her

room at that moment, held her hand protectingly before the flickering flame of a wax-taper, so that the light fell full upon her good old face.

“Is it possible!” she exclaimed, angrily. “Why, you young hussy, you must be mad! Roaring out in that manner! I thought she must have won the great prize in the lottery, at the very least. Stuff and nonsense! A wedding indeed, and a bride unbeknown to us all! You can give a very good guess who it is likely to be, I’ll be bound. There is a pair of lovers at the garden-gate every evening, I know, in spite of the snow. Go in, child, I am coming with you,” she added, speaking to Lizzie, who slowly opened the dining-room door, and went in with the old woman.

They were all sitting round the table, her father, mother, and the pastor. The

latter was in the act of saying grace. Then Dolly came in with the steaming roast goose, which the master at once set about carving.

“Do you know, Pastor,” said he, taking up the thread of a previous conversation, and drawing the knife across the smooth bright steel; “it would be a real blessing if the thing could come about, but I don’t believe it. They have been talking about it for the last ten years or more.”

“Well, Friedrich, I can only tell you what I heard in B—— lately from the architect Leonhardt. He said a commission would be appointed in the spring to buy up the different lots of land, and as soon as this was done, the line would be commenced. It makes but little difference to me whether we have a railway or not, I only wish . . .” And

he passed his hand across his brow, as though to drive the care from it.

“You are anxious about the children, Pastor,” said the mistress, after a pause, and her tone was full of sympathy.

“Well, yes; I will honestly own it,” replied he, looking really troubled. “We are all in God’s hands, we know, but the human heart is easily cast down. This mischievous complaint has assumed such serious proportions this year. Below yonder, in the village, there are children down with it in almost every house. In many cases, one, or even two of a family have I followed to the grave; and bow as we may, and do, to the will of the Almighty, Minna, we cannot chase anxiety from our minds.”

“Oh, Uncle dear, is it so bad as that?” Lizzie looked across at him with great startled eyes. It struck her suddenly

that she was horribly cold and selfish. She had been so engrossed by her own great happiness that she had not even remarked his anxious looks. "Shall I go home with you? May I help?"

"On no account, Lizzie. It is an insidious, a most infectious disease. Not for all the world!" said the Pastor, kindly, pressing her little hand. "No, no, my Rosina will manage all alone. We should not heedlessly put ourselves in danger's way. You are an only child, and must be careful of yourself for your parents' sake. No, I thank you, Lizzie, we shall do very well. Besides, I must be going home directly after supper. Rosina absolutely drove me out, or I should not be here."

"Well, come, Pastor," said the master, cordially, raising his glass. "Let us drink to their speedy recovery at home.

May all go well, and may we have had our anxiety for nothing ! ”

“ God grant it ! ” The Pastor’s grave face brightened again. “ But I must not spoil your Christmas evening for you, must I, Lizzie ? ” he added, bracing himself with an effort. “ You were looking so radiant just now. What have you and Nelly been about ? Your face was brimming over with delight at something. ”

Lizzie blushed like a crimson rose.

“ Ah, things will hardly be looking so radiant up yonder, ” put in Herr Erving, with a shake of the head.

“ True, they have their bitter sorrow too, ” sighed the Pastor. “ ‘ Little children, little cares ; grown-up children, grown-up cares ! ’ So is it all the world over. ”

“ Well, well, ” said the old woman. “ A wee bit of trust in God helps us over

much. As for the boy Army, I have no great fear for him. . A few false words from a lass's lips won't break his heart. He has too proud a spirit for that. Oft-times an old love is just tinder to kindle a new. He'll be having another sweet-heart before long, you'll see."

"Ah, these are secondary considerations, Auntie, but think of the unhappy circumstances in which the family . . ."

Clap fell the door back on its hinges, and behold! the young girl had disappeared from their midst. The rest of the party sat looking at one another in mute surprise.

CHAPTER V.

THE pastor had gone off home without seeing the girl again. He had called good-night from the hall, but had met with no response.

Old Aunty went looking for her Lily all over the house. She was not in the parlour, nor in the smaller room where the Christmas tree was dressed; so the old woman crept upstairs, and cautiously opened the door of her darling's bedroom. It was almost dark within, still she could just distinguish a slender figure standing by the window, looking out into the silent snow-white night.

“Lily!” said the old woman softly.

“Aunty!” The answering cry seemed to come from a full heart.

“Tell me, child, what is it? You have not got the headache—you are not ill, are you?”

But, in lieu of a reply, the girl's arms wound themselves about her, and a burning face was hidden against her neck. She could feel that the slight form, which clung so closely to her, was shaking with repressed sobs.

“Child! Lily, what ails you?” asked the old woman in alarm. “Has any one been troubling you?”

She shook her head.

“What is it then, my lamb?” And she drew the reluctant girl to the sofa, sat down beside her, and took her into her embrace.

“Oh, Aunty! dear, dearest Aunty!”

“What, then, my heart’s darling? Why, she is laughing, I declare!” she exclaimed in the same breath. “You foolish child, what is it all about?”

“Oh, I feel as if I must laugh and cry, and I don’t know what all,” she whispered. “Shut your eyes, Aunt, and I will tell you why. Oh, I am so afraid of you . . .”

“Afraid of me! Well, I must say, it is very like you! Now, steady, out with it! What have you been doing?”

“I—I—I am engaged to be married, Aunt,” said the girl, falteringly. “Could not you see it directly you looked at me?”

“Engaged, child! Engaged to be married!”

“Oh, and I am so happy, so happy! Army . . .”

“Army!” groaned the old woman,

and her teeth fairly chattered with affright. "Army and you engaged!" she repeated, in a very low voice. "So that is it, that is it."

"Aunty, have not you a kind word for me? We are so fond—so fond of each other."

"Fond? He fond of you?"

"Why, Aunty, how you say that! Would he have asked me to marry him if he were not?"

"Merciful Lord!" The old woman's soul thrilled as the cruel thought flashed upon her—"the poor silly child! She thinks he loves her, and all he wants is her money to save him from ruin." And in mute anguish she felt for her darling's hands, which burned like fire between her own icy fingers. Then the sweet voice murmured in her ear again, babbling the same happy, foolish nonsense

that Lisette had talked of old when confiding her love-secret.

“Just fancy, Aunty, I can make life bright to him again, he says. He will learn to love it again, to feel how beautiful and good it is. I shall be able to do all this, Aunty. Is it really true, do you think? Oh, Aunty, it was up there under the old lime-tree, just at the place where I met him once three years ago, that he asked me. And now, you will tell father and mother, will you not? I should die with shame if I had to own I cared for any strange man. I can't do it; but you will for me, will you not? If it had not been so dark here I never could have told you. Do speak, Aunty; give me just one kiss . . .”

Lisette—Lisette! Was it not she in person who sat whispering there? “Oh,

God!"—the silent cry went up from the old woman's tortured heart—"is this the blessing on the child for which I have prayed early and late? Has she not deserved something better—a thousand times better—than such a fate as this?" Then she sat a few minutes dumb and rigid.

"Lily," she said at length, in a tone of deep emotion, "you have no idea what you have done, no idea of the trouble you would be bringing on yourself if this miserable—do not be angry, I must speak—this miserable engagement were persevered in. You do not know the old Baroness as I know her. She is a very devil. She would make you wretched as she made my poor Lisette, whose death she has on her conscience; and I think mine would not be clear if I were to let such a misfortune

come to pass, and not to warn you now, while there is yet time, while no one knows of your love but just me and your two selves. Be still!" she exhorted, as Lizzie tried to interrupt her, "be still, for your old Aunty's sake and for your own. That which I give you may be bitter to the taste, but it is wholesome medicine, and I pray God you may receive it, and that it may profit you. You must now hear Lisette's story. If you remember, I thought of telling it you in the spring, because I saw what was coming, but I could not bring myself to go through it all. Would I had—would to God I had!"

The young girl crouched speechless at her feet. No sound from her lips betrayed how the fresh blossom of her maiden joy shrank and drooped within her, as though a sharp, sudden current

of icy air had sent a blight through all her smiling spring.

“Well, then,” began the old woman, in a deep-toned voice, “Baron Fritz, the brother of these children’s grandfather, was betrothed to Lisette. They had plighted their troth to each other in secret. Nobody knew of it but me. Baron Fritz meant to wait until he was of age, and then to speak to his brother, and ask Lisette’s parents for her hand in marriage; then they were to buy a place and settle down in it. They were a happy pair, Lily, and a handsome one to boot, and they were so fond of each other, it was a pleasure to see them together down in the old arbour by the water. Baron Fritz, a fine young officer of Hussars, was stationed with his regiment in a small town not far from this. He came over right often, and when it

was about time for him to arrive, Lisette would go and stand by the window in her little room, and look across at the tower yonder. Presently a flame of light would shoot up there, that was the signal that he was coming. Then she would give a joyful cry and clap her hands, and run out a bit into the forest to meet him.

“And then—it was a summer evening, I remember—the brother’s handsome young wife, Nelly’s grandmother that is, came home as a bride to the old Castle. Lisette and I had run out to have a look at her. The whole Castle was lighted up, and the servants were waiting with torches by the steps of the main entrance. Baron Fritz was there, too, with his old mother. By-and-by, a carriage drove up containing the young couple. In justice, it must be said, the bride was handsome; but there was pride in the way she held

herself, pride in her pale face, pride gleaming in her great black eyes. Lisette turned quite pale as she looked after her.

“‘She will never be my friend,’ the poor child said to me. And she was right. God only knows how that proud young lady found out that Baron Fritz was sweet on our Lisette, and who suggested to her the devilish idea of parting them. I only know that she succeeded, and by what means!—in what a way!

“It was autumn, and the hunting season, and the Castle was full of guests. The sound of the tally-ho could be heard from the forests, and every evening the windows of the Castle were brilliantly lighted. Then began the mad goings-on which the new young mistress so loved, and with which she brought the family to the verge of beggary. Baron Fritz

came down one night to take leave of Lisette. He was going away, and would not be able to see her again for some time. At parting, she gave him a little gold heart which she always wore round her neck. I heard her say to him, 'There, love, put the lock of my hair in it, and let it remind you of me sometimes.' Well, Lizzie, that golden locket was the cause of poor Lisette's death. But listen to the rest—Baron Fritz went away, and a fortnight passed. The lovers could not write to each other, or all would have been known. At that time people were not so set on writing as they are now-a-days; they thought of each other the more, and perhaps the contrary may now hold good. Well, so Fritz left, and Lisette, from the force of old habit, would stand every evening at the window, and peer over at the turret-

chamber yonder, for that was where Baron Fritz always dwelt when he was here. But evening after evening passed, and all was quite dark. It could not be otherwise, for, as we knew, he was not to come again for a whole month, and only a fortnight of it had gone. Then, one evening, Lisette gave a sudden scream, and ran to meet me, as I was coming in with the stocking I was knitting, meaning to sit and chat with her awhile.

“ ‘Goodness!’ she cried. ‘He is here. There is a light in the turret!’ and sure enough a bright gleam shone over to us from the bay window. She did not stop to put on a shawl even, but rushed out of the house. After a while she returned. ‘He did not come,’ she said; ‘what can it mean?’ I shook my head. ‘You must wait, Lisettchen, I will ask Christian in

the morning.' But Christian never came near me, and at noon a boy brought me a message that I was not to expect him; he had been sent on a journey to fetch a new horse that had been bought for my lady, the Baroness.

"Lisette was in a state of anxiety I can find no words to describe. As soon as dusk fell, she went to the window, and there was the light again plainly to be seen. Again she ran out into the open air, she came back sometime later looking very pale, and, throwing herself into the corner of the sofa, began to cry. The Lord knows! I think she must have had some sort of presentiment of what was in store for her, for she would not hear of consolation. 'He is there, and he does not come to me. He does not love me any longer. Ah!' she sobbed, 'I shall die, I shall die if it is so.'

“On the third evening the same thing happened. Lisette was as white now as the chalk on the wall. After this the turret was left in darkness. About four days later she and I were sitting before the porch in the noonday sunshine, plucking fieldfares. Lisette’s eyes followed the feathers vacantly, as they floated away in the air, and one great sigh after another broke from her breast. All at once a girl came over the foot-bridge towards us. At first we did not know her, for her new scarlet frock, with its black ribbons fairly dazzled us; but then Lisette said, ‘Why, that is mad Francy! what can she want here?’ And, to be sure, so it was. She came straight up to us with a jigging movement of her pretty little feet. She had on fine shoes with sandals and snow-white stockings. Two long plaits, as black as the bodice

she wore, hung down her back. She was friendliness itself, or so you would have said, if you had seen her face as she turned it towards Lisette. It was a comely face with its sparkling eyes and small straight nose. Now you must know, Lizzie, that Francy had been confirmed with us, and a wilder lass than she there surely never was in this world. A band of gipsies had once been allowed to camp in the field behind the churchyard hedge. When they had gone, she was found, a baby of hardly a week old, and she was brought up in the poor-house. A giddy, idle slut she had been from the first, a worry and torment to all the village; but my lady, the Baroness, took a fancy to her one day when she went up to the Castle with a basket of strawberries. 'She reminded her of her own country,' my lady said. So Francy

was taken into Madam's service, and went about decked out as fine as though the good days our Lord gives us were made for nothing but folly and frippery.

“We soon heard, however, that she was still the same mad Francy. Many strange gentlemen came to the Castle, and Francy was pretty, too pretty. She would certainly have found some honest lad whom she might have taken for her sweetheart before the face of all the world; but she was the giddiest of the giddy, and, thank God, a girl's honour was still held in some account in our country-side.

“So she came on to us. From her small ears hung great gleaming earrings, and there was a ring on the hand she displayed so much as she settled her snow-white apron.

“‘Good morning,’ she cried to us, and Lisette said in return,

“ ‘Good morning,’ adding, ‘What do you want, Francy?’ ”

“ ‘Mercy me! I just saw the Mamsells sitting out here, and I thought I would step round and see how things were going on down at the Mill. You need not be ashamed of me, you know, for we were all confirmed together; but perhaps you have grown proud since then?’ ”

“ ‘No,’ said Lisette; ‘I am not proud, but you don’t come here without some reason. So tell me quickly what it is you want.’ ”

“ ‘Nothing at all, my good miss,’ she replied, pretending to be offended; ‘you have no cause to be ashamed of me. I don’t beg now, I have plenty of bread to eat without that!’ and as she spoke she laughed, showing all her white teeth, and twirled round on her heel, so that

her red petticoat and her long plaits spun all about her. 'You look so pale,' she said then suddenly, peering curiously into Lisette's face; 'got some love trouble, eh?'

"Lisette crimsoned to the temples. 'What is it to you how I look?' she replied shortly, and got up in such a hurried way that all the little feathers in her lap flew out in a cloud. Suddenly I saw a horror-struck expression come into her face. With a quick movement she pressed her hand on her heart, and then sank down on the bench again as white as a sheet. Following the direction of her eyes, my look fell on a small gold heart-shaped locket, which stuck out of the kerchief on Francy's bosom.

"'Good God!' cried Lisette; then, with one bound, she sprang upon Francy, seized her by the shoulder, and in a voice

which pierced to one's very marrow, so shrill was it with fear and anguish, she asked, 'Where did you get that heart from, Francy?' "

Lizzie hung in breathless suspense on the lips of the narrator.

"For a moment all was still," continued old Aunty, after a pause; "then you should have heard with what misery in her tone Lisette repeated—

" 'Where did you get that gold heart from, Francy?' She seemed as if she were trying to read the words off Francy's lips. The other stood with her head thrown far back and her arms crossed, looking at my poor girl with her gleaming eyes. A derisive smile stole into her face, and the corners of her mouth worked mischievously.

" 'What is that to you?' she asked, trying to free herself.

“ ‘What is it to me? Good God! she asks what it is to me! Marie, help me, help me!’ cried Lisette. ‘It is mine, no, not mine, his, I gave it to him.’

“ ‘I went up to them slowly, for I felt numb and stiff with fright. ‘Give the thing back, Francy,’ I said. ‘You found it somewhere, did you not?’

“ ‘What do you mean, both of you?’ cried she, shaking off Lisette’s hand which lay heavily on her shoulder. ‘I wonder you don’t say I stole it! It is my property. I shall never give it up but to him from whom I had it. And now you had better not lay a finger on me. I should think you might remember of old that I can scratch.’ She stepped back, clenching her hands angrily. Then, suddenly, she turned to go.

“ ‘Stop!’ cried Lisette, seizing her by the arm again. ‘I ask you in our

Saviour's name, who gave you that locket?' She stood before the girl, drawn up to her full height, her little hand solemnly raised, as though to conjure forth the truth. A quiver passed through her frame. That moment I shall never forget, Lizzie. I wanted to go to her, to support her, but somehow I was constrained to stand still and look—she was so beautiful. A ray from the autumn sun pierced through the bare branches of the lime-tree, and glinted on her brown hair, forming a sort of halo about her head, and a saintly picture it was as she stood there like a pure angel confronting one of the lost.

“Francy had grown quite pale on first meeting Lisette's eyes—but then she tore herself away, and said, ‘Why do you want to know? Did I ask you who gave you the gold ring you were

kissing so rapturously in the arbour a little while ago. Yes, yes, I saw you,' she laughed; 'and mayn't I have a lover in secret, as well as you, if I like. Do you think because you are the rich mill-owner's handsome Lisette that mad Francy can suit nobody's taste? Good-bye, Lisette, and don't stare at me with those astonished eyes. I don't mean to say another word!' She broke into a malicious laugh, and ran off over the foot-bridge, her red petticoat flaming before us in the sunshine as she went.

"But Lisette stood quite motionless, pale and rigid, gazing after the gipsy girl, and when I went up to the poor child and tried to comfort her, she pushed me from her, and walked away up to her own room. I did not know what to do, whether I ought to follow her or not. My heart was beating fit to burst, and

as I stood there trying to make up my mind, Lisette's mother came out to me, and gave me something to do, and scolded because the feathers were all scattered about the ground. I did the work which was given me, but the tears came rushing from my eyes as I thought of poor Lisette and her bitter trouble. Good Lord! who would have believed it! Could it really be true that he had given his sweetheart's pledge to that light-minded lussy? But indeed, how could she have got it, unless. . . . Then, that light in the turret window three evenings together! 'Oh, Saviour mine,' I thought; 'what will become of us!' And as soon as I could, I ran up to Lisette. There she stood at the window, looking across at the Castle, and when I went near, and tried to put my arm round her, she said in a very low voice—

“ ‘Don’t, Marie, dear. Let me be. What comfort can you give me? Go downstairs, go down. I shall get over it by myself.’

“I shook my head, and went. I could hardly speak for crying; but just as I was closing the room-door, I heard a fearful, piercing shriek, and when I ran back terrified, I found her shaking all over as if she were in convulsions—then she fell to the floor. I tried to raise her, but she lay in my arms as heavy as if she had been dead, and already I heard her mother’s foot on the stairs, coming up to us . . .

“Child, child, how shall I put it all before you? To myself it seems like some dull, bad dream. Lisette had fallen dangerously ill. The doctor gave no hope. I sat by her bedside day and night, and listened to her strange delirious

talk. She would chatter away so sweetly at times, holding conversations with her lover, that my heart seemed to stand still within me from very melancholy.

“From the ravings of the fever the mother first heard of her child’s great joy and sorrow. She would stand and look with a mournful, pitiful gaze at the lovely young creature who had been cast so rudely from her pinnacle of happiness. The father raged and stormed, cursing the faithless scoundrel who was the cause of all the trouble ; but Lisette’s brother said, ‘There is some devilry at the bottom of all this. I know Fritz. He is as true as steel.’

“Ah, child, the praying and weeping that went on in that little room ! We wrung our hands till they were sore, and besought the Lord for that young life ; but when the finger of time points the

hour, He will suffer no man's hand to put it back. So on the ninth day, just when the sky was golden from the rays of the setting sun, its glow fell on a pale face, and the blue eyes saw it no more. So peaceful was she, as she lay there, so calm and still, removed from all sorrow and suffering! But I threw myself beside her and clung to her, shrieking from over-much pain and grief."

The old woman paused and wiped her eyes. Lizzie had hidden her head in Aunty's lap, but the sound of her low sobs could be heard.

"That same evening," the narrator went on, taking up the thread again, "the very evening Lisette died, just as the bell was tolling for her down in the village, I ran out into the garden, for I could find no rest anywhere, and as I was standing there outside, suddenly a light

shot up in the tower yonder. It came upon me with a shock, and my tears burst forth anew, for *she* was lying so quiet in that little room upstairs, *she* could see it no longer! I leaned against the wall of the house, and cried as if my heart would break.

“Indoors I could hear the master’s step, pacing restlessly up and down the parlour, then the mother’s dreary sobs, and her son’s comforting tones; else all around was still, still as death. The bells had ceased tolling now. The machinery at the Mill had never moved that day, and the men and maids in both houses crept about noiselessly, and whispered to one another, as if they were afraid of disturbing our Lisette in her sleep.

“Suddenly I heard a quick, steady tread approaching. “Oh, God be

thanked, my Christian is coming," thought I. But at that moment the step sounded on the foot-bridge, and a gay voice trolled forth a loud, merry tune. It pierced to my heart's core. Good heavens! that was Baron Fritz! Before I could prevent it, for I was half paralysed with terror, he was in the house. I followed, and saw him open the parlour door, saw him standing face to face with the master. His bright, happy eyes were roving round, seeking Lisette in every corner.

"The mistress sank back with a scream on beholding him, but Herr Erving rushed upon him with a savage cry.

" 'You accursed scoundrel! do you come here to mock me in my misery?' and he fairly dragged him into the room.

"The master was a choleric man, but

Lisette's brother sprang between the two as they wrestled together.

“ ‘ Ask him first, father, whether he is guilty.’

“ But the elder man stood close to him, and hissed, ‘ Lisette, you are seeking Lisette, Baron ? Well, she is lying there upstairs. Go up and look at her.’ Then he covered his face with his hands, and groaned in his wild, fierce pain.

“ ‘ Come, Fritz,’ said the young master, and drew the other into the next room. ‘ Come with me. I will tell you the terrible trouble that has befallen us.’ Then he closed the door behind them, and I remained alone with the unhappy parents. Not a word reached us from the next room. Once only we heard a deep, agonized groan, that was all. The minutes seemed endless as we waited in torturing suspense. I sat at the window,

looking out into the night. All at once I started back in terror, for a face was pressed against the panes outside, and a pair of great dark eyes, with a scared, horrified look in them, gazed into the room. Then a hand beckoned to me, and the face disappeared. I had recognized it, and knew that mad Francy was there.

“ ‘God have mercy on us,’ thought I. ‘What does she want here again?’ But I went out softly, and there she stood, clinging with both hands to the doorpost. By the faint light which came from the ante-room I could see a face all drawn and distorted, over which long tresses of black hair fell loosely, making her appearance still more strange and terrible. She trembled so that she could hardly stand upright, and when I looked at her with a surprised, questioning look,

she moved her pale lips, but no sound came from them.

“ ‘Lisette?’ she asked at length, in a hoarse whisper. ‘Is it true what people say? Was that bell tolling for Lisette?’

“ ‘She is sleeping her last long sleep,’ I replied.

“ ‘Good God!’ shrieked the girl, ‘is it true, is it really true?’

“ At that moment Baron Fritz came out of the next room with our young master behind him, carrying a light. He was as pale as death, and his eyes glowed like coals of fire in his head. Evidently he was going up to the death-chamber. His look fell on the crouching figure on the ground. He recognized her and stopped.

“ ‘It was said I gave my betrothed’s keepsake to *her*, was it?’ he asked with unnatural calmness, his eyes resting on

her with an expression of utter contempt. 'Friedrich, do you believe that? Speak, creature,' he cried then, in a voice which shook with rage, 'speak. You stole the gold locket from me. I missed it a few minutes before I left.'

"The girl raised her hands to him imploringly. 'No, no.'

"'Will you confess, you worthless wretch?' he cried, raising the riding-whip he held in his hand.

"'Strike me, sir, strike me. I have deserved it, but I never stole the locket. I swear it by all that is holy. They gave it me, as true as I lie here. I never would have put it on as I did, for a bit of fun, if I had known what would come of it.'

"Baron Fritz let fall the arm he had raised. 'Out with you,' he cried, pointing to the door. 'You shall at least not

disturb this house of mourning. You will not escape me.'

"She raised herself with an effort. 'Mercy,' she cried; 'forgive me. I am a vain, foolish thing, but I am not wicked. Oh, Baron Fritz, I would so willingly die, if by that I could bring Lisette to life again.' She looked so broken by remorse, so utterly piteous, as she stood before him with her folded hands and haggard eyes, that our young master suggested to Baron Fritz, 'Ask who told her to put on the little gold heart for a bit of fun. Perhaps she will say.'

" 'Who told you to put on the gold heart?' said the Baron, repeating the question mechanically—and a sudden light shot up in his eyes. A perception of some terrible secret had flashed upon him.

" 'Say, Francy,' said the young master

to her in a low tone ; ‘ if you really wish us to believe that you meant no ill when you . . . ’

“ ‘ No, truly, truly not,’ she shrieked. ‘ I never meant any harm. I only wanted to tease Lisette, because she was always so proud and cold to me, and I could never get any hold upon her. So I was quite ready when *she* told me to . . . No, I must not speak, I dare not betray . . . ’

“ She was trembling all over.

“ ‘ Go,’ said Baron Fritz, suddenly. ‘ I will not hear it now ; there has been foul play here. Some devilish fraud has been practised.’

“ He raised his arm, pointing to her to go, and the girl rushed sobbing out into the dark night. I stepped outside the door, and looked after her. I could just make out her figure as she passed

the foot-bridge ; then she disappeared into the darkness. It had turned to a stormy night, and all sorts of strange noises were abroad. There would come through the air first a dull roar, and then a howling and shrill piping. The sky was black with clouds. Not a single star shone out, and the branches of the old limes creaked and bowed beneath the violent gusts of wind. It was enough to make one's flesh creep out there in the open air, and yet I stayed. When a sudden storm like that bursts over the land, they say in these parts that some poor despairing creature has taken his own life, and we pray God to have mercy on his soul, though we know not who the poor sinner may be. So I folded my hands, and was about to say a prayer, when a sudden pang seized my heart. Good God ! Suppose it should be

Francy! On the spur of the moment I started in search—then I stopped to think. Where was I to look for her?

“Indoors the master’s restless pacing had begun again, and again the mother’s sobs and the son’s consoling words sounded at intervals. But where was Baron Fritz? By the deathbed still? The clock in the village below struck ten. Then I heard footsteps coming down the stairs—slow, dragging footsteps like those of an old man. I looked into the hall. There he stood by the baluster, white as any corpse; his merry handsome face changed almost past recognition. He cast one look up above, and then walked slowly towards the parlour door. When he got close to it a great shudder ran through him. He turned quickly away, and went out, passing the place where I stood without seeing me, out into the

dark night, a crushed and broken-hearted man. That was the last time I ever saw him. He took to reckless courses, and led a desperate wild life. Grief was gnawing at his heart, no doubt, poor fellow ! He never came to Derenberg again, and he has been dead and gone now this many a year. May God grant him peaceful rest !

“ But mad Francy had disappeared too ; nobody knew where. Up at the Castle, and in the village, everyone said the young Baron had carried her off, and some doubt of him even crept into my mind afresh. On the day that Lisette was buried, I walked up with my Christian to the churchyard towards dusk, to see the newly made grave, and as I stood beside it, crying and putting straight all the wreaths the people had sent for my darling, Christian said to me—‘ Look,

Marie, there is something white like a note, folded up,' and, sure enough, it was a piece of paper with a stone set upon it to keep it from flying away. When I unfolded it, I saw written in great awkward characters: 'What the people say is not true. He never looked at me. I don't know where he is, and he does not know where I am. You will none of you ever see me again. Do not think too ill of me; I put on the gold locket because my mistress ordered me to. She said it was only to have a bit of fun with Lisette. Sanna was there, you can ask her. May God forgive me! I did not mean to do such harm.

“‘FRANZISKA.’

“That is what the old Baroness did in those days to prevent Lisette of the Mill marrying into her proud family—

and, child"—the old woman smoothed the girl's hair as she lay prone and shattered with emotion at her feet—"you, our only one, our ewe lamb, you will not put it in her power to practise her wicked tricks on us again. You will not be so wanting to us or to yourself. She would soon be at them, depend on it. She hates us all here at the Mill, because she has that on her conscience about Lisette. Look ye, my darling, though my heart aches for you, I have but one thing to say. Bury and forget all that has this day passed between you two!"

"I cannot, Aunty," replied the young girl wearily, but with a certain determination in her tone; and as she spoke she rose to her feet, and stood erect and steady before the old woman. "Aunt Lisette's story is a very, very sad one, but I have promised Army that I will

save him, and I must keep my word. When I have told him this tale about Aunt Lisette, he will be warned, you know, and on his guard. Be kind and merciful, Aunty, and don't try to dissuade me," she went on after a pause, breaking out with passionate earnestness, and falling on her knees again before her faithful friend. "We love each other so well, so well! Help us to be happy. Tell father of it downstairs, and mother too, and persuade them to say yes. You will do this for me, dear, sweet Aunty, will you not?" and the poor girl's great humid eyes gazed beseechingly up into old Aunty's face, while two soft palms closed round the wrinkled hands, and held them in a tight, firm grasp.

"May the Lord have pity on us!" pondered the old woman. "It has done no good. This is the old, old story of

love that learns wisdom only through its own bitter experience. And he does not care for her. It is all false. If I only had the heart to tell her so! and Friedrich will never consent . . .”

“Will you speak to them, Aunty?” came a whisper in her ear—a little whisper, melancholy, yet coaxing.

“Yes, my darling. I see there is no help for it. But sleep quietly to-night. To-morrow, in the morning. . . .”

“No, this evening, at once!” she implored. “To-morrow he is coming. Father must have the night to think what he will say to him. Pray, pray, Aunty!”

“You are right, my child. It will be better to do it at once,” assented the old woman, in a voice half-choked by emotion. “Let me get up. I will go down to them; but you go to bed, and

sleep soundly. To-morrow morning you shall hear early enough what they say, my precious."

"How could I sleep, Auntie?" she cried, springing up and laying her small trembling hands on the old woman's shoulder.

Old Marie made no answer. She hastily opened the door and walked out. Lizzie followed her into the dusky passage, and bent over the baluster. There went the messenger down the broad winding stairs, but how slowly she moved. The old feet could at other times trip along so nimbly, but to-night they seemed weighted with lead. Slowly, slowly, stair by stair, she went. They fairly creaked beneath Auntie's heavy tread, and her hands held so fast by the twisted baluster. At length the old figure disappeared from Lizzie's sight, the lagging steps sounded over the

stone hall,—now, now! that was the parlour door. Now she was inside, and the interview had begun.

“Shall I be able to hear up here? What will they say?” In breathless suspense she stood, leaning over the baluster. Hardly a sound reached her. Now and then she could just hear Dolly humming a tune to herself in the kitchen, and a rattle of knives and plates. Then all was hushed and quiet as before.

“But now—that was father’s voice! Is he angry? He spoke so loud! and now that’s Aunty speaking. Lizzie’s heart began to throb violently; she pressed both hands on it. What if her father would not consent? But that was impossible, utterly impossible! Why, it was *Army*, *Army*, who loved her! What a talking was going on! They were all speaking together now. Then came

Aunty's voice again, conciliatory, pacifying, then again her father's. The words rang out distinctly this time, half-stunning the listener as they fell on her ear.

"No, no, I say. A thousand times, no. Not if you were all to go down on your knees to me. I understand what course I have to pursue."

For a moment the great blue eyes stared almost vacantly into space. Then she flew down the stairs, and next moment stood in the centre of the parlour, her face now flushing crimson, now turning to a deadly pallor. "Father!" she said, imploringly.

He stopped and looked at her. A swollen blue vein stood out on his broad white forehead. She knew it well. It was with him a sign of terrible agitation, and his eyes darted lightnings at her. Aunty went up to the girl with a face

profoundly troubled. "Come, Lizzie, come upstairs."

"No, Aunt, let me be. I will know what father says."

"What your father says?" his voice thundered in her ear. "He says that you are a young fool, who has had too much liberty, and too much of her own way. But we will make up for any over-indulgence now. Be very sure of that."

"That means I am not to be Army's wife, father?" She suddenly stood erect before him, and looked him steadily in the face.

"No, my child. I say it for your good. I will not suffer my daughter to be made the victim of a speculation."

"Speculation!" repeated Lizzie, growing pale as death. "I do not know what you mean by that, father. You think, perhaps, that Army does not care for me."

It may be so, possibly ; but if he does not care for me quite as much as I care for him, that will make no difference to me. I know that life will be worth nothing to him until . . .”

“Until he has paid his debts, child.”

“Aunty !” she appealed to the old woman in her dire distress. “Do you believe that of Army? Oh, speak ; if only one word !” She said it so pleadingly with such absolute conviction in her tone, that the crystal tears started to the old woman’s eyes.

“Come, come, my Lily,” she whispered. “Your father is angry now, and excited. To-morrow he will be calmer.”

“No, no, Aunty. You must tell father what you think. He sets such store on your opinion.”

The old woman stood silent, a prey to the most painful embarrassment. The

tears coursed down her furrowed cheeks, and her hands were nervously busy, plaiting the hem of her apron.

“You believe it too, Auntty?” It was a pained cry, but as yet no tears stood in Lizzie’s eyes. “Father, I *know* that it is not so. It is not possible—no, it is not possible.”

“I can understand your distress, Lizzie,” he said, more quietly; “but how could you be so foolish as to believe in a sudden affection of this sort, kindled all in a moment. You are generally such a sensible, good girl. Now think—he has known you always, and he preferred a stranger to you. It never entered his head to think of loving or marrying you. You were thrown together as children, and were fond of each other as such—nothing more. But now, now that he knows not which way to turn, he bethinks

himself of his old playmate, the little girl who has some fortune of her own now, and seeks to obtain her hand to save himself from ruin—and she is foolish enough to take that for love! Must I appeal to your maidenly pride, Lizzie?”

She made no reply, but her eyes rested on her father's face with an almost dazed expression.

“Nelly's mother was sacrificed in this way, my child. Did her fate ever appear to you an enviable one? Must it not always have been humiliating to her to feel that, from her husband's point of view, she herself was only the necessary and troublesome appendage to her fortune? He did not love his wife, and, therefore, he led a wild roystering life, spending all they had, and when her dowry was exhausted, he shot himself. Is not that a wretched fate, Lizzie, my

child, and will you ask of me that I shall stand by and suffer you to plunge into a like abyss of misery?"

Then the folded hands fell from Lizzie's breast. She grasped the table by which she stood. Her pale lips moved, as though she wished to speak, but no word escaped them. The cups on the table jarred audibly, shaken by the poor girl's violent trembling.

"Lily, for the love of God, speak to us," cried old Aunty, clasping her in her arms.

"I thank you, father," said Lizzie, freeing herself gently, and speaking in a very low voice. "I . . . I will obey you." She turned and walked slowly to the door. Everything in the room was spinning round and round before her eyes. She heard her Aunty's voice speaking again, and then the door closed behind

her. With failing limbs she mounted the stairs, leaning heavily on the baluster. At length, at length she was up in her own room once more. Utterly spent and exhausted, she sank prostrate on the little sofa.

Her father came up presently, and stroked her cheeks, and called her his good, sensible child, telling her that surely much happiness was in store for her yet. Old Aunty sat by her, crying softly, and speaking every now and then a tender, comforting word. Lizzie heard it all as from some immeasurable distance. The one thought present to her mind, repeating itself in constant iteration, was this: "He does not love me. He did not want me myself, but only my worldly goods, because he is poor." Was it really but an hour or two since they had stood under the old lime-tree, since she

had laid her head on his breast, and listened to his whispered words. Had not ages passed since that time—long, weary ages? What an ocean of sorrow and pain seemed to divide now from then!

She groaned aloud and pressed her hands to her breast. Alas, for her brief spell of happiness, for her sweet love-dream, past, past for ever! The hot blood rushed to her cheeks as she remembered how confidently she had acknowledged that she loved him. That must be to him but a matter of indifference. He did not want her love, he wanted her money. Where could she hide herself away from the sight of every one? She closed her eyes, and thought. How would it be when he came and found that his proposal was rejected? How would the proud handsome face look at

that moment? "Then he will go," she thought. In imagination she could see him walk out of her father's room across the hall, his tall figure proudly drawn up to its full height. He would not turn to look towards her window; he would go, go, never to return. Ah, that "never" was a bitter word, comprehending infinite, unutterable pain.

"Oh, Aunty!" she moaned in her misery, and the old woman bent down to her tenderly.

"Cry, my pretty one, cry. It will do thee good."

"Ah, if it were only over!" she whispered.

"The worst hours pass, if we can only pray."

"I cannot pray, Aunty, I cannot!" And so the night spent itself, and the day dawned which was to bring him to

her father. Lizzie's face that morning was almost unnaturally calm, but her eyes glowed with a feverish lustre. She performed all her little duties about the house as usual, and then she went up to her own room and took a book. Old Aunty came up, and began to talk kindly about indifferent things. She listened and answered, and then the old woman went down to attend to her domestic affairs again. Slowly, but surely, the hands of the clock advanced, until they pointed to eleven. Suddenly a deep crimson flush dyed her face. She had recognized his step in the hall, and directly afterwards there came the sound of her father's voice. She moved as though she would rush to the door, but then she lowered her eyes to her book again. The pages trembled in her hand. She laid the book on the table, and bent

over it. Involuntarily she read half aloud—

“Thou leavest me, life’s gayer scenes entice thee.
Farewell! I do not seek to hold thee back.
For what has been, I gratefully do thank thee,
This world’s best blessings mayst thou never lack.
Mayst never know the hours when, fever-tossed,
We sleepless lie, revolving all the past, and sigh
For that which irretrievably is lost!”

“Which irretrievably is lost!” she repeated to herself.

“I know not what our span of years may be,
But this I know—our common life is o’er;
The days we spent in such sweet company
Are gone for evermore.”

“For evermore!” The book fell to the ground. Was it right of her to let him go forth into a troubled life, without support or stay? She might have saved him from need, and from disgrace. After all, this was Army, her old comrade and friend. There was time still. All might yet be well.

She ran out of her room to the head of the stairs. There she stopped. "Ah no," she breathed—she had forgotten! He did not love her! Again she called to her aid her maidenly dignity and pride, which for a brief moment had yielded to the old passionate love. How long he was staying with her father! Hark, that was the door! Was it Army going? She bent over the rails—he was crossing the hall. She could see the rings of his dark hair curling round his cap. How erect and straight he walked! Her heart beat loud and strong. The remembrance of the previous day came over her with all its ardent glow, its divine happiness—and now, now, he put his hand on the door. When it fell back on its hinges, all would be over—for ever—hopelessly, irretrievably lost. "Army!" she screamed suddenly, and flew down

the stairs. But at that moment the heavy oaken door closed with a crash which reverberated through the lofty hall. "Army!" she repeated faintly, stretching out her arms. A torrent of hot tears burst from her eyes, and slowly she went up again, back to her own little room. Gone for evermore! How desolate the world seemed! How unspeakably dreary and void!

CHAPTER VI.

THE old Baroness sat by the fire in her own room, awaiting with eager impatience the appearance of her grandson. Three times Sanna had been sent downstairs to inquire about him of the ladies there, and each time she had returned to her mistress with the answer that the young lieutenant had not yet returned from his walk.

“God help me!” lamented the old lady, going up to the window. “What will become of him? What will become of us all? He goes out with perfect equanimity to take a walk, never think-

ing how he may stave off ruin from the house of Derenberg. I verily believe he has not a drop of my blood in his veins."

The park lay before her in its cold, silent, winter splendour. The noonday sun glistened on the icicles drooping from the branches, and cast a dazzling glare on the white snow-carpeted lawns. Deathly stillness and solitude all around; not a living being far or near—or, at most, a few hungry birds on the bare boughs. And for years this dreary desolation had encompassed the old Castle! A great shudder passed through her as she stood looking out. "Why should it affect her?" she asked herself. "Surely she was accustomed by this time to live hidden and forgotten. But in these latter days she had been thinking so much of long bygone times, when pleasure and gaiety were as the air she

breathed—and now she would have to live on in the old comfortless way. Perhaps things would even be worse than hitherto, if the Duke of R—— did not comply with her wish. No, no, that was not to be thought of, and yet . . . Suppose he were to refuse! She clenched her delicate hands. “Oh, that serpent, that Blanche!” she murmured, with a fiery gleam in her great dark eyes. Her face did not clear, when, a moment afterwards, the red curtains were parted, and Armand stepped into the room.

“Have you really returned from your walk already?” she asked ironically.

“I have not been for a walk,” he replied with assumed calm; but there was in his tone a vibration betokening strong excitement which did not escape the old lady. She cast a scrutinising glance at him.

“Not? Where have you been then? I have sent for you three or four times. Surely an interview between us was more important than anything you could have on hand just now. But it is always the same story. You have your mother’s character; you are indolent to the last degree.”

“On the contrary, Granny; I have just been endeavouring to follow out some of your advice. I am sorry to say the experiment has failed—signally.” He passed his handkerchief over his heated face, and threw his cap on the nearest table.

“How so?” she asked. “I do not understand. Some of my advice?”

“Certainly. I wished—I have attempted to make a rich marriage, but as I said before . . .”

The Baroness started back, and stared at him with wide-opened eyes.

“You are astonished, Granny—that is natural. Only this morning I was wondering that the idea had never occurred to yourself, but now I divine that nothing could be further from your thoughts or wishes than a marriage between myself and Lizzie Erving.”

“I really believe you are mad, Army.”

“Why so? Did you not yourself advise me to seek out a rich *parti*, and this little girl is rich enough. According to you, nothing more is requisite.”

“Never, never will I permit it!” cried the old lady, in a frenzy. “How could such a thought ever come into your mind? That insufferable creature *your* wife! the very notion is outrageous.”

“I have already told you that the experiment has failed,” he replied calmly; and as he spoke he threw back his head, and passed his hand caressingly over his

black moustache. "I have made my proposal and been rejected—sent about my business in the distinctest fashion. After this, I must beg of you not to accuse me of indolence any more." His words and tone betrayed a certain amount of wounded pride.

"Refused?" she asked, surprised and incredulous. "Refused, you say, Army?"

"Decidedly. Herr Erving declared to me that he desired for his child a husband who had some love for her. He did not wish her to be looked upon merely as a troublesome adjunct to her fortune. That was plain enough, was it not? I cannot take it amiss from the man. It seemed to me, as I stood before him, that I looked a deuced pitiful fellow. I never felt so small in my life before."

His grandmother shrugged her shoul-

ders, and turned her back upon him. "Sentimental phrases!" she said. "Out of a thousand marriages you will hardly find one based on other considerations. I am only surprised that this Herr . . . Herr Erving gave such an answer. People of his class will generally pay debts three times the amount of yours with the object of making their daughter a Baroness. But there is, no doubt, something else in the background."

She sat down in the armchair by the fire, and watched the flames with an air of studied indifference.

"You are perfectly right there, Granny. There is something in the background. I told her father that I would do all in my power, honourably all in my power, to uphold Lizzie's dignity, to protect and guard her from trouble, as only a husband can; and it was no lie, but my honest intention."

“Really!” she said, ironically.

He flushed scarlet. “Really!” he replied. “Do you think I would allow a girl, who came to me with all confidence, to feel it was not love that led me to marry her? Not I. Least of all would I wound such a warm, pure, innocent heart as hers.”

“Dear, dear! and when have we studied her heart so profoundly?”

“You forget, Granny, that we grew up together, and that of late I have had many opportunities of seeing her. Last autumn she was here nursing my mother for weeks . . .”

“Ah! I suppose you fell in love with the Sister of Mercy. You Germans, I know, never think a woman so charming as when she is ministering thus. Her proper place is by a sick bed or in the nursery! Well, there is this to be said,

the girl certainly offers you a piquant contrast to Blanche."

The young man frowned. "Pray, Granny, let me have no more of this," he replied. "It is perfectly needless to draw comparisons; but we have quite drifted from our original topic. You said there was something in the background to account for the rejection of my suit, something special. Now this something special—you must excuse me if I speak plainly—relates to certain painful passages in the history of the family, to some bitter trouble—connected also with a love-affair—which plunged the old house into mourning for many a long day. I shall now use my best endeavours to clear up the mystery which still hangs over the sad story."

The young officer spoke the last words in an emphatic tone of voice, looking

fixedly at the proud face opposite him as he pronounced them. He fancied that it grew a shade paler, but not a muscle moved to betray emotion.

“It matters not to me what may have induced this mill-owner to decline your suit,” was the old lady’s harsh reply. “I am not acquainted with the family chronicles. Any reason he may have offered is acceptable to me, for I never should have given my consent to so idiotic a project.”

“In that case I should have been compelled to marry without it,” said he, coolly. “You must understand that these are not matters to be trifled with. I have given the young girl my word; she has accepted me, and that is enough. It would have been different if she herself had refused me. But I am convinced that I should have obtained her hand

had it not been for these sad occurrences which stand in the way. The parents will not let their child enter the enemy's house, the house where *you* dwell, Granny."

"I?" The Baroness fairly sprang up from her chair. "Absurd!" she said, then dropping back into her seat. "Hitherto these people have been in a most eminent degree indifferent to me . . ."

She paused, and for a while there was silence in the room. After some moments the old lady breathed more freely. The anxious expression which, during her grandson's last speech, had deepened the lines about her mouth, vanished, and she glanced across at him almost with an air of friendly solicitation.

"I wanted to speak to you, Army," she said at length. "We must talk over

matters a little together. I have written to the Duke, and am convinced that the money will be sent; but I shall be obliged to retain a part of it for myself. The rest will be for you, and I trust it will be sufficient to satisfy the more importunate of your creditors. But what is to be done then? and, above all, what if, contrary to all expectation, the help we are looking for should not be forthcoming?"

"I do not believe in the Duke's readiness to assist," he said, moodily; "even should he comply, it would be only as a drop in the ocean. I see nothing for me but—America."

Suddenly he felt a tight grasp on his shoulder, and saw his mother's face bending over him. "Army!" she asked breathlessly, "what are you saying? You are going away, away from me?"

He started and caught her hand. He would willingly have soothed her into calm again; but the horror-struck, haggard eyes read and re-read his features with too keen a scrutiny. He let her hand drop, and turned away.

“Cornelia, you know how I detest your coming in in this noiseless, sudden way!” scolded the old lady; but the other paid no heed to her. The mother’s heart stood still within her, paralysed by that one terrible word—America!

“Good God, is there nobody, nobody in the world to help us? Army, I shall die if you go away!” she besought him pitifully. “That will be the last, the cruelest blow of all!”

“Do not fret, do not worry yourself, mother,” he said, without looking at her. “I . . . I will stay, certainly . . .”

“No, no, I know how it will be,” she

cried. "You will start off secretly, without saying good-bye. I shall wake up one morning and find that my son has left me. Army, can you find in your heart to do it? Can you go away, knowing that you will never see me again?" There was a piercing, heart-rending accent of sorrow in the words.

With a sudden exasperated gesture the young man thrust the hair back from his brow. "Good heavens!" he cried, "do not make the thing harder to me with your lamentations, mother. Do reflect. I have tremendous debts: that is fact the first in the case. I cannot pay—fact the second. I have done all I can to find an issue from this position, in vain. At the New Year the whole affair will get wind. There are bills to be met. I shall be put under arrest. I cannot remain in the service. What choice is

left me? Do you think the idea is pleasant to me, one that makes me happy?" He got up and walked hastily out of the room, throwing the door back on its hinges behind him with a crash.

For one moment he stayed his foot outside, fancying he heard a cry from his mother. Then he walked away, drawing a letter from his tunic as he went, and tearing it open. "Just so, the game is beginning," he muttered, skimming through the lines. With a gloomy face he turned into his own room, and threw himself into the arm-chair which stood before the old fire-place.

That morning a ray of hope had yet shone upon him—Lizzie! The words she had whispered in his ear the evening before beneath the old snow-laden lime had come to him like a message of peace after all the stormy passages of the past

weeks. They were such pure, innocent words, springing from a heart which overflowed with joy and happy exultation. His old playmate's sweet, shame-faced tenderness was as the perfume of violets to him. He had met with genuine true love for once. True love? No, it was hardly that yet, or she would not have submitted so readily to her father when he said, "You will be unhappy, you must break with him." But he could hardly blame her for her conduct. Her father had, no doubt, declared to her, "He does not love you, he only loves your money." That would be enough in itself, and then, what was the meaning of all this story about his grandmother? Baron Fritz and Lisette! Herr Erving had mentioned their names that morning while enumerating his principal reasons for declining the young

man's suit. Heaven only knew what strange things might be hidden in the past. Erving had been so guarded in his speech. But bah! after all, it made no difference now. How soon would the report spread among the officers of his garrison—"It is all up with Von Derenberg. He has thought fit to leave this world by a short cut. Debts, tremendous debts! It is in the family. His father made away with himself much in the same way. These things are happening every day—hardly worth mentioning."

Thus he sat brooding a long, long time. His mother! He should have been her support and stay. Yes, he did believe she would die if he went, and Nelly—poor little thing!—suppose she were left quite alone? He sprang up hastily, and tore open his tunic. In the middle of the room he stopped, gazing fixedly over

at the wall before him. There, in that vacant space, had hung the portrait of the fair Agneta Maud, which he himself had brought from the gallery because it was so like *her*. He had taken it down when she broke faith with him, and it still stood there with its face to the wall.

He walked over to it, raised it, and hung it in its place. The wonderful countenance, with the deep mournful eyes, looked down upon him again with the old irresistible, familiar charm. He crossed his arms and considered it long and closely. To that hair, to that luxuriant golden-red hair, he owed it that he had become the ruined man he was. What a foolish, fatal passion it had been! For one moment a glow of ardent longing came over him. Would any feeling of regret cloud her face when she heard to what a pass he had come? As

the thought crossed his mind, he laughed almost aloud. No, Blanche's cold, glittering eyes could not beam mild and soft as these. The portrait was not like her, not at all, with the exception of the hair. A bitter, scornful expression played about his mouth. "Canst find such free from trick and vice?" he murmured. "Free from trick! Not one, by Heaven, not one!

Absorbed in these thoughts, he did not hear the door of his room open gently, slowly; did not see a pale girlish face look in with a wistful, uncertain glance; did not notice a slender figure advancing towards him with hesitating steps. In the middle of the room she stopped. Her eyes had caught sight of, and were riveted on, the golden-haired woman's head in the picture opposite, at which the young man was still intently gazing.

Involuntarily she started back, as though to flee away. Then he turned.

“Lizzie!” he stammered, “Lizzie, you here!”

She did not reply, but looked at him sadly with great pained eyes.

“What is it you wish, Lizzie?” he said. “Are you looking for my sister? She . . . I do not know if she . . .”

“No,” she answered, “I came to see you.”

“To see me?” he asked in a low voice.

“Yes, I . . . I was so anxious, Army. Your mother has been down to us. She said you meant . . . Oh, don’t go away, Army, don’t go. It would kill me!” The last words swelled into a bitter cry. She covered her glowing face with her hands.

“*You* ask me to stay, Lizzie, and this

morning you let them send me from the house?" he said bitterly.

"Oh, it would make me so wretched if you went, Army, so wretched! But it is worse a thousand times to know that you do not love me, that you only want me for . . ."

"Your father told you that, Lizzie?"

"Yes, and it is true, is it not, Army? If I had still felt some little doubt, when your mother came to seek help from my father, that you might not be driven away abroad, it *must* all have become clear to me; I *must* believe it now, however much my heart may strive against the conviction."

"She has been to your father to beg for me?" he asked vehemently, going up to the girl. "That is a little too much!"

"She loves you so well, Army, and she did not know that you . . . that

father . . .” She looked at him beseechingly. “Don’t go, Army; oh, do not go!”

She stood before him, so simple and charming in her deep-blue merino dress, her eyelashes lowered in maidenly confusion, her breast heaving with anxiety on his account, with agitation at the thought of the step she had taken. Some of her long tresses had fallen loose in her hasty run up to the Castle, and hung in disorder over her shoulders. She did not notice it. Imploringly she stretched towards him her trembling hands tightly clasped; but he did not venture to follow his impulse and seize them in his own.

There before him, embodied in the most gracious form, was love, that great all-conquering woman’s love, of which but a while ago he had doubted, at which he had almost scoffed.

“Do not be proud, Army,” so at length

she spoke, "for your mother's sake and mine. I should be miserable all my life to think I had not saved you. We will be comrades together, good friends and comrades as in the old days, Army . . ."

A long pause ensued. He had turned his face from her, and was gazing intently at the ground, his arms tightly crossed on his breast. She looked at him inquiringly, and gradually a deep, deep glow overspread her face, her joined hands fell asunder, and two great tear-drops stole from beneath her eyelashes. A burning, stifling feeling of shame arose within her. She turned and walked to the door. Then footsteps sounded outside, hurried, well-known footsteps. Her great eyes wandered round the room, anxiously seeking a refuge, until they rested on his face. She stood irresolute and helpless.

“Aunty,” she whispered. “She is coming to look for me.”

But even as she spoke, Army stood beside her. He drew her protectingly to him. In confusion and distress she drooped her head on his shoulder; it seemed to her that the loud beating of her heart must be audible afar off. Now the door was opened. Involuntarily she clung more closely to him, expecting every moment to hear a familiar voice address her in angry reproachful tones. But all was still. The old woman on the threshold stood motionless, her eyes resting with a pained, astonished look on the scene before her. Yonder, in the lofty dimly-lighted room, exactly beneath the great chandelier composed of noble antlers artistically arranged, stood a young couple. Army had placed his arms about the girl's slender waist.

He held his promised wife in his firm embrace, and looked darkly across at the old woman as though he felt aggrieved at her intrusion. There they stood, the two young people, offering a picture of perfect concord and felicity.

“Well-a-day! well-a-day! Love and death yield to no man!” She had guessed it all when Lizzie had left the old house so hastily; she had hurried after her with all the speed at her command; but who at sixty-five can run like a fleet-footed young creature in her teens? The poor child had rushed upon her misfortune with open arms.

“Lizzie!” she cried at length, reproachfully.

Then the girl looked up and freed herself from her lover’s hold.

“Ah, do not scold me!” she entreated in a low voice. “I could not help it,

Aunty," and she stretched out her hands to her. She tried to smile, but failed in the attempt. Irresistible tears forced themselves from her eyes. She threw herself almost passionately on the old woman's neck, and, between her sobs, murmured again and again, "I could not help it, Aunty. Oh, Aunty, I could not help it!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE following day brought bad weather. A thaw had set in, and the glistening snow-carpet had disappeared as by enchantment. The dripping brown branches showed bare against the grey sky, and the wind howled and raged among them. The alders by the mill-stream bowed their heads, and almost reeled beneath its stormy gusts.

A very quiet, subdued humour prevailed at the Mill that day. The maids in the kitchen talked to each other in whispers, and the coachman, who had stolen in to them, sat and scratched his ear with

looks which spoke volumes. From time to time the master's raised voice could be heard from the parlour. The young Baron was with him. He had been down at the Mill the day before, and since then Lizzie had appeared agitated and had shown a face colourless as the white-washed wall. There *must* be something wrong; that was clear as day. Old Aunty went about looking as sour as vinegar, and now here was the master in a tantrum, evidently.

Presently the parlour door fell to with a clap, and old Aunty crossed the hall and walked up-stairs, as Dolly observed, watching through a friendly chink.

“ Mark my words, Mina, our young lady has got her way. Aunty has gone up to fetch her down. Well, after all, why not? He is a handsome man and a swell. They had a fancy for each

other when he was home as a cadet on leave."

Peter rubbed his ear again before giving his opinion.

"Now, I tell you what, if I were in the master's shoes, I would just say *no*—on account of the old 'un up at the Castle."

"Pst!" whispered Dolly. "It is just as I said. She is coming downstairs—now they are going into the parlour. Hurrah! We shall be having a betrothal and a wedding breakfast. Won't that be fine?"

Next instant she was standing demurely before the table with her plates and dishes, for she had caught sight of Aunty coming over towards the kitchen. The old woman came straight in. There were care-worn lines on the wrinkled face, and the eyes bore traces of recent bitter

weeping, or so the girls thought. She stood a minute, apparently lost in thought; then she unhooked the bunch of keys from her apron-string, and went to the store-closet.

“Glasses, Dolly,” she ordered, coming out with some bottles of wine; “and mind and put on a clean apron when you bring them in.”

She stood the bottles on the table, and went out, wiping her eyes.

“Goodness gracious!” cried the girl, when she came back from the parlour, banging the empty tray down on the table. “Well, that is a queer sort of betrothal, I must say! They all look more as if they were at a funeral. The master is biting his lip to keep himself from crying, I believe. The mistress is sobbing away, as if Lizzie were dead, and old Aunty is keeping her company.

Then there's the Baron standing bolt upright by young Miss, as stiff as a stock. I saw him put his lips to her hand—just as if, when people get engaged, they did not ought to give each other a good hearty kiss, and our Lily looked . . . ! Well, Lord ha' mercy, if one's to be no happier than that when one's going to be married ! ”

About half an hour later a young pair crossed the threshold of the old house. Old Aunty stood at the window looking after them. As they passed beneath the old lime-tree, a pale little face turned and smiled “good-bye ” at her. There was no radiant happiness in it, none of the coy delight so natural to a child-bride elect on entering this new phase of her life. A pained, and almost stern, expression was stamped about the mouth, and the eyes looked forth from beneath

the long lashes with a grave, sorrowful gaze. Her affianced husband had taken her hand and placed it within his arm. So they walked on together, Lizzie's little veil blowing from her face high into the air with each gust of wind. Neither of them spoke. At length they came to the old linden-tree; at sight of it, the girl's hand trembled on his arm, and a bright flush mounted to her face.

“You are tired, Lizzie. Have I been walking too fast?”

“Oh no, but I . . . I do feel so afraid of your grandmamma.”

The young man bit his lip, and remained silent. He himself was in a state of uncertainty and suspense by no means agreeable. He knew his grandmother well enough to be aware that she was capable of behaving most unpleasantly, that she would be restrained by no con-

sideration for the feelings of others. Again they walked on, and soon reached the avenue. The wind howled through the long rows of trees, and tossed their branches wildly about; yonder loomed the great portal of the Castle, flanked by its old stone bears; it looked more cold and drear than ever on that wild rainy day. As they reached the outer gate, Lizzie's eyes scanned it involuntarily.

“What does that mean?” she asked suddenly, pointing to the escutcheon.

“*Nunquam retrorsum*—Never recede,” he replied.

“That is good,” said she, drawing a deep breath. Then she quickened her pace.

At length they stood before the small turret-door, and again for a moment her heart failed her. “How shall I bear it

if she insults me?" she asked herself, and a great fear of the haughty old dame arose within her, almost stifling the pulsation of her heart. She felt as if she must turn back, must fly now, before it was too late. She was so helpless, so unprotected, for he would not shield her, or understand her trouble. It was not as if he had loved her!

"Lizzie!" cried a clear, joyful voice, and, with an outbreak of happy tears, Nelly threw her arms round her friend's neck. "Lizzie! My sister Lizzie!"

As she stood submitting to the kisses, a flicker of sunshine stole over her face, and there was further comfort in store for her. On the threshold of the dear familiar old parlour another welcome awaited the young girl. Two arms were outstretched towards her, and loving words were breathed into her ear.

“My dear mother!” she whispered, and bent over the thin hand. “I will always be a dutiful daughter to you, I will indeed—and a good wife to Army.” The last words came falteringly and in a very low voice.

“You will excuse me an instant, Lizzie, I will go and let my grandmother know we are here,” said Army.

She bowed her head in assent, and he went, to return almost immediately, ominously silent. Her heart throbbed loud and fast. Involuntarily she folded her hands, and stood awaiting the critical moment. The colour in her cheeks ebbed and flowed. All the old lady’s previous harshness and haughty impertinence came back to her in that moment. The insulting speeches she had heard appeared before her, written, as it were, in letters of fire—then a gracious image

rose before her, the sweet face of her great-aunt Lisette, and, with a sigh and a shudder, she thought of the early grave over in the churchyard yonder.

“My lady regrets that she will not be able to receive any one to-day, as she is suffering from a headache.” Sanna’s voice, delivering this message, startled the young girl from her troubled reverie.

“I must beg, then, that she will appoint an hour to-morrow when I can call and present to her my promised bride.” The words were spoken calmly, but there was a dangerous light in Army’s eyes, as he turned towards the old waiting-woman, who was glaring at Lizzie with an expression akin to hatred. Involuntarily the girl drew herself proudly erect, and Nelly, feeling the slight conveyed in her grandmother’s message, clasped her friend’s hand, and gently stroked her cheek.

“Mother,” began Armand, taking a seat near Lizzie, “Herr Erving begs that you will grant him an interview, and we should think it exceedingly kind of you if you would go down to the Mill to-day with Nelly, so that you may talk over our affairs . . .”

“Certainly, Army, certainly. I should have gone down to-day with Nelly any way, provided the weather had admitted of it.”

“My lady is quite unable to make an appointment for to-morrow, but she begs the Herr Lieutenant will call and see her for a few minutes this evening.” So ran the answer the old serving-woman brought.

“I am sorry, Sanna, but this evening I shall not be at liberty. We are going down to the Mill to celebrate my betrothal. Do you hear, Sanna? Down to

the Mill. I regret that your mistress is suffering from a headache which will deprive us of her company to-night. Say that we, my promised bride and myself, send all kind messages and our best wishes for her speedy recovery."

"Si, signor," hissed the old woman between her teeth, and disappeared.

There was a silence. Armand paced up and down the room in visible perturbation. His mother had drawn the girl down by her on the sofa, and held her hand tightly in her own. Good Heavens! it was terribly hard. The full consciousness of her painful position suddenly rushed upon Lizzie. She thought she should die if her father were to hear that one of the nearest relations of the man she was to marry refused even to see her. Then what would old Auntie say? But it had been all her own doing; she

had willed it so, and had given a promise that she would never complain. Ah! if he did but love her, then all would seem easy.

“I must go home,” she said, rising. The room had suddenly grown so close and hot, she felt as if she should suffocate.

“Why be in such a hurry?” asked Army.

“I—I think I ought to let them know at home that mamma and Nelly are coming,” she stammered.

He took up his cap.

“Please stay here,” she begged anxiously. “I can very well go alone. You will come later on with your mother.”

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently. “Good-bye for the present, mother. Good-bye, Nelly,” he called, while Lizzie,

pulling down her veil, held out her hand to them, and took a silent leave with averted face.

It was still raining and blowing hard as they again went on their way side by side in silence.

“You are too lightly clad,” said Army at length; and, taking off his cloak, he tried to put it about her shoulders.

“No, I am really not cold. Thank you very much.”

He threw the cloak over his arm, and walked on by her side.

“The road is almost impassable,” he began again, after a while, “and we shall soon be coming to the place where the mill-stream has overflowed its banks. Wait a minute. We are there already. I will just see if there is not a path yonder through the bushes.”

In the grey twilight she could just

discern his slender figure, as he groped about on the other side of the road, seeking a path. Presently he came back.

“It won’t do. The water is ankle-deep everywhere. I will carry you over.”

“No,” she cried, retreating from him ;
“on no account.”

“Why not ? ”

“Because I do not wish you to take any trouble at all for me. Wet feet will do me no harm—not the very least in the world. We shall be at home directly.”

He made no reply, and in the darkness the hot flush which mounted to his face was not apparent. Next instant she felt herself lifted by two strong arms, and in a trice she was landed on the other side of the pool.

“You must forgive me,” he said coolly, and not without a shade of bitterness, as they stood together once more on *terra firma*. “A lady could not possibly get over that place without assistance.”

They walked on in silence the rest of the way. When they entered the hall, the maids’ curious eyes peeped out at them from the kitchen, and old Aunty came forth to meet them.

“What weather!” she said, in an amicable tone, opening the parlour door.

“Good evening, Aunty,” said Armand, and sought to take her hand, but the old woman withdrew it with marked haste.

“Will you please go in, Baron,” said she stiffly. “Lizzie shall come directly. I have something to say to her first, and you, no doubt, have much to talk over with her father.” She took the girl’s

hand, and drew her away into her own little room.

“We are going to have visitors, Aunty,” said Lizzie. “Peter must go up with the carriage to fetch Army’s mother and Nelly.”

“Very well, I will go and tell him.”

The old woman went out. When she returned, the flickering light of the lamp she carried fell on a haggard, tear-stained face, which the darkness had previously concealed from view.

“You have been crying, Aunty,” said Lizzie, bending down to her.

“Well, yes, dear, it may be so. Never mind. I wanted to say a few words to you to-night, because this has been your betrothal-day.” She placed the lamp on the table, and went up to the young girl. “Look ye, Lizzie, I always thought it would be a happier day for all of us; I

never expected to see you looking pale and wan as you are this night. It is your own willing, child. You say yourself you are happy, and you besought your parents for their consent on your knees; but you can't deceive me, Lily. I know full well what is going on in that poor little heart of yours, and it pains me so, I could just lay me down and die for grief."

She turned away, went up to the chest of drawers, and began straightening the cover, and pushing the little boxes on it right and left, while the tears coursed down her cheeks and fell upon her wrinkled hands. Lizzie stood quite silent in the middle of the room.

"What frights me most, child, is that you are so still and wrapt in yourself. Speak to me, my lamb, speak. It will ease you, you will feel better afterwards."

“What shall I say, Aunt? There is nothing the matter with me that I care to speak of,” she replied.

“Come here to me, my Lily, and promise me one thing,” implored the old woman. “If ever he should forget what you have done for him, if ever he should be unkind to you, and I am living still, then come to me, child, come to me. I will speak to him, and he will not venture on it a second time.”

She only smiled: “Do not be uneasy, Aunt, dear.”

“And the old Baroness, child? Have you spoken to her yet?”

“No, Aunt. I think she will not see me.”

The old woman started up, and an indescribably bitter expression flitted across the kind good face. A sharp speech was at her tongue’s end, but a

glance at the pale maiden before her checked its utterance. "Good Lord!" she murmured, "and all this with no love in return!" and again her eyes filled with tears.

The sound of the carriage, which was to fetch the ladies from the Castle, was heard now droning over the bridge, and at the same moment the house-door was opened, and a loud talking arose. Then came a pitiful outcry from Dolly.

"Mercy on me, you don't say so! Oh, gracious me, how sorry I am!"

"That is old Thomas from the Parsonage," said Aunty, opening the door. True enough, there stood the bent old man, holding in his hand his cap, from which the rain was dripping. Dolly saw Aunt Marie, and called out to her.

"Oh, do hear. The pastor's little Karl is dead. He died just before Thomas came out. Oh, how sorry I am!"

“Karl?” asked Lizzie, and in an instant she was at the messenger’s side.

“Karl?”

“Yes, he fell asleep at six o’clock. Ah, Miss Lily, the poor mother, and the father! He was such a fine little fellow! Good Lord, what trouble they are in down yonder. They can hardly be made to believe it yet.”

The girl was still wearing her cloak and hat. Without pausing a moment to reflect, she walked towards the house-door.

“Where are you going, child, in such weather?”

“I am going to Uncle Pastor, Aunty; don’t stop me.” And almost before she had spoken, she was outside in the wild rough night, struggling against the wind, and not even hearing the old woman’s remonstrating cries, which were lost in the roar of the storm. Overhead the branches

of the alders were thrown to and fro by the gale, and bowed down to the surface of the rushing, brawling stream. A carriage came rolling towards her. She stepped aside and let it pass, and then went on her way more quickly than before. This tempestuous weather came to her almost as a relief. It would have been torture to sit by his side in the snug well-lighted room at home, affecting a happiness which really did not exist. He did not love her; he had only wanted her for her money's sake. The generous enthusiasm of self-sacrifice, with which she had offered him her hand, waned in presence of the humiliations she had since undergone. And he, who had accepted the sacrifice, what had he done to mitigate her trouble, or lessen those mortifying stings? Was it so hard to be her good comrade and friend?

How wildly the old linden-tree flung its branches about, and how quickly the clouds chased each other athwart the dark sky! And yonder in the low-lying village, at the Parsonage, tears were falling, hot, scalding tears! How she envied those who might weep! But she would not let the people at home, no, she was determined she would not let them all look at her with compassionate, pitying glances—her father and mother, old Aunty too, and perhaps even Dolly and Mina. No, that would be too terrible; that would be more than she could bear!

Did not she hear the sound of hasty footsteps behind her, followed by the cry, “Lizzie! Lizzie!” She stopped. Surely that was his voice. If only she could go back to him now, if only she could cling to his arm, and hear him say—“I was

anxious about you, that was why I came." But no, her father had sent him doubtless, or perhaps he would have followed any one, have allowed no lady to brave such a storm alone.

"Lizzie!" his voice reached her now distinctly. "How could you venture out in such weather? Your father and mother are half wild with anxiety. Here is a shawl Aunty told me to bring, and wait a minute, the carriage must be up directly. I said it was to be sent on after us at once. Are you still the same little madcap Lily, whose good heart always warmed with compassion at the mention of even a stranger's misfortunes?"

She smiled rather bitterly. "They are no strangers to me down at the Parsonage. We are, so to speak, all one family."

He made no reply to this cold speech.

Just then the carriage drove up, and halted close to them.

“ May I go with you ? ” he asked, as he helped her in. “ Or do you prefer to be alone ? ”

She would have preferred the latter, but, glancing at him, she remarked that he was wearing his uniform only, without a cloak.

“ I should be sorry for you to get cold on my account,” she said, in a low voice. “ Come in, please.”

After a short drive, the carriage drew up before the Parsonage door. Lizzie alighted and went in alone. The hall was dark, and everything seemed very still. She stole up to the parlour-door and knocked. Her knock resounded with a startling echo, but no friendly response was heard. A vague sense of fear came over her in that house of death, but she

groped her way bravely forwards. There was the staircase, and here to the right the small study. She tapped gently,—again no answer, but through the chink a light was gleaming. She opened the door and peeped in. There sat her “Uncle Pastor,” at the table, his face hidden in his hands; before him lay an open Bible.

“Uncle Pastor! Uncle Pastor!” she cried, breaking into sobs, and hid her face on his shoulder.

“Lily, you good child! Yes, a heavy blow has fallen on us,” he said mournfully, stroking her damp brown tresses. “And you came out in this weather. How good of you! Think, Lizzie, our Karl, our handsome, high-spirited boy! Oh, it is hard not to murmur against the decrees of God! My poor Rosina! He was her chief pride and delight.”

“ Ah, Uncle, Uncle ! ” sobbed the girl, overwhelmed by all her bitter pain. “ How sad life is, how hard ! ”

“ You should not have come, my good child.” She heard a whisper in her ear, and the little woman with red, tearful eyes, who had just entered, raised her head and kissed her. “ It excites you, and may make you ill.”

“ May I not see Karl once more, dear Aunt ? ” she said, sobbing still.

In the adjoining room a pale, boyish face lay surrounded by snow-white pillows. She went up softly, and looked at the dear, familiar features. How often had that mouth called her “ Cousin Lizzie ; ” how often had those great eyes looked up at her, laughing merrily ! And now all was so still, so silent. The little woman at her side pressed her face down into the pillows again, and the father stood

opposite and gazed at all that remained to him of his proudest dreams and hopes. But Lizzie's tears ceased flowing. There was such wonderful peace in the childish countenance before her. How good and pleasant it must be to sleep so sweetly with that happy smile on one's lips, to depart without ever having known life's pain and sorrows !

“ Do not cry, Aunt. Look, he sleeps so quietly.” Then she turned slowly to go.

She stopped a moment in the study. “ Uncle,” said she, in a low tone, laying her hand on his arm, “ may I trouble you with a question at such a time as this ? ”

“ At this or any other time, my Lizzie. Do I guess rightly in supposing the question has reference to you and Army ?

Something of the matter has reached my ears to-day."

"Yes, Uncle, and I cannot go away without asking you how I ought to act." She sat down on the small sofa. "Father refused his consent," she went on, "and Aunty said a marriage with Army would bring misery on me, and be a great misfortune to us all, because he was not thinking of me, but only of my money, and my father appealed to my sense of pride, to my dignity as a woman. At first I submitted to him. It was so terrible to hear all that. I wanted to be strong, Uncle, but then—then his mother came in great trouble and distress, saying he was going away, off to America. Something within me drove me to him, and I begged him not to go. I was half-distracted with pain and grief. He should think of me only as his comrade,

I told him. Then my father consented, because I begged so hard. I went down on my knees to him, Uncle. I should have died if Army had been driven away to America, and I had not tried all in my power to save him. Army does not know what a struggle there was, or all it cost. And now, when I am with him, it seems almost more than I can bear. Every step I take by his side seems to tear open the wound in my heart afresh, and it hurts my pride too cruelly to think that, though I am his promised wife, he has no love for me. Oh, Uncle, I am so unhappy, so terribly unhappy!" She broke into tears, and hid her face in the sofa cushions.

"Dear child," said the minister, gently smoothing her luxuriant hair, as he sat down by her, and took her hand. "An inscription in my Rosina's album occurs

to me. Her old grandmother wrote it down for her, when she, a young girl, was leaving home to go out in the world and earn her living as a governess. 'Should a conflict of feeling ever arise within you, my dear child, should a sense of mortification and wounded vanity war against an inclination to forgiveness and love, then let love triumph, even at the cost of some humiliation. The best, the noblest thing a woman can do is to love, to love always, though sorrow may accrue to her through it.' Have patience, child," he added, as the girl looked up at him with tearful, glistening eyes. "He has lately sustained a bitter disappointment, and the consciousness that the step he has now taken may be interpreted to his disadvantage, must be torturing enough to his proud spirit. He will get over this and be grateful to you, feeling that you

have saved him from poverty and disgrace ; and one day you will discover in his heart a spark of love, which, by dint of much humility and forbearance, and by never-wearying cheerful kindness, you may foster, until it blazes forth into a bright, clear flame. But be very careful that this first faint spark be not extinguished by any over-sensitiveness and tetchiness on your part. Treat him as you would treat a sick child."

Lizzie had risen. "I thank you, Uncle," she said in a low voice. "You will say what you can to reassure my parents, will you not, and tell them all, father and mother and Aunt, that I may be happy in my future life? I will be friendly and kind to Army, and indulgent, and will strive against my over-sensitiveness. Oh, if only father would make it up with us both ! He is so stern and

sombre, and he has such a troubled look."

"It is hard for him to divest himself of anxiety, child. You, his only daughter, are going from him into the midst of dangers and difficulties, are entering a sphere altogether different from his. Do not blame him if his brow is clouded, and make allowances for old Aunty, too. She loves you so well. They will both be bright enough when they see you a happy, contented woman at Army's side, and this lies in your own hands. You love him, and you know love endures everything, hopes everything . . ."

"That is a good saying, Uncle," she exclaimed with a beaming look, holding out her hand to him as she spoke. "I will strive to carry it out. Good-bye, Uncle. I will come again tomorrow; and oh, dear, dear Uncle,

think, Karl has been spared so much pain ! ”

Outside at the carriage door Army was waiting. He helped her in, and took his place at her side. Again the two drove away in the darkness in silence.

“ Army,” she said suddenly, laying her hand on his shoulder, “ I was cross just now and unkind. Forgive me. I have just come from a house of mourning.”

He took her hand in his, and turned towards her.

“ I have a favour to ask of you,” she went on, before he could make reply. “ You know that my father gave his consent to our marriage reluctantly, with a heavy heart. Forgive him, Army. I am his only child, you know. Pretend to care for me just a little, and let him think you are happy. I will do the same ; indeed, I can say I am happy, really.”

He gave her no answer.

“Will you, Army?” she asked falteringly.

The carriage had already crossed the Mill bridge, and was rolling on past the house of business. Peter drove round the bare lindens with a sweep, and stopped before the house door. Armand's head was still averted, he was looking out of the other window. Dolly came out with the lantern, and pulled open the carriage-door. He sprang to the ground, and offered Lizzie his hand to help her alight. His face showed that he was deeply moved. He was to *pretend* to love her, she had said. What if he were to declare to her now, “My whole heart is going out to you with the impulses of a warm affection, to you, my own sweet, pure-minded darling. There is an atmosphere of peace about you which cools my fever.

You hold the balm which will heal all my wounds, even those left by a fatal, foolish passion!" Would she believe him? Ah, that was just the wretched part of it—he had forfeited her confidence.

He looked up at her, wishing to answer her. What should he say? At the moment he could frame no speech, and she was waiting. By the vacillating light from the lantern he could see the charming head advanced out of the carriage towards him, the small fur cap which covered it pushed just a little to one side on the luxuriant brown locks. The delicate face was still flushed from weeping, but a coy smile lurked about the cherry mouth, hollowing out a delicious dimple in either cheek. The eyes were grave enough, however. They looked into his, as though beseeching for

an answer, and in his confusion he almost retreated before them. Where had he seen such eyes? They gazed at him so mournfully, seeking, as it were, some lost, bygone happiness. He drew her to him almost passionately, and looked deep into those troubled orbs, which gradually cleared, till at length they grew radiant. . . .

The carriage had driven away, and Dolly had run in quickly out of the wind and rain, to the shelter of the hall. The two young people stood alone outside in the darkness. Again he tried to speak, and again his lips closed involuntarily. "She would not believe you," he said to himself. And she dared not ask him again, for now he slowly relinquished the hand he held in his own. "He will not lie," she thought, as she crossed the old threshold. "He will make no

promises he cannot keep. He does not love me." The light in those beaming eyes died out again, and with a hopeless gesture she pressed both hands on her heart. "Ah, no, I see it but too surely; he does not, never will love me."

CHAPTER VIII.

“AND you say, Henry, that my grandmother saw the two together?”

“The girl Francy confided it to me, Lieutenant, the evening before she disappeared.”

The young officer sat in one of the great armchairs in his own room, looking scrutinisingly and with an expression of lively interest at the old man who stood before him in a respectful attitude. A certain embarrassment was depicted on old Henry's features. Armand had summoned him to his presence at a late hour, and, taking him altogether by surprise,

had put questions to him relating to long-past events. The young man wanted to find out by what motives his grandmother was actuated, and what was the origin of that hatred which had manifested itself again to-day in her behaviour towards himself and Lizzie. He wished to hear from an impartial witness the exact bearing of those allusions which had fallen from Herr Erving's lips. It had at length occurred to his mind that he might question Henry; and the old man in reply to his inquiries soon began, though shyly at first and with some hesitation, to tell the tale of young Baron Fritz who had fallen so desperately in love with the beautiful Lisette down at the Mill.

“One evening about that time,” continued old Henry; “Baron Fritz rode up to the Castle in fine high spirits. I

took off his overcoat, and then I unlocked the turret-chamber for him, and lighted a fire there, for it was cold weather."

"The turret-chamber?" interrupted the young officer, hastily.

"Yes, Lieutenant, Baron Fritz always occupied that room, and well I know the reason why. It was from there he could best see his sweetheart's windows—so I made the fire, fetched him a bottle of Madeira, and helped him to change his clothes. He asked me about all that was going on, and whether his brother had come home, and I answered it all, and told him that my master was expected back in about three days from that time. Then he wanted to know what his mother and sister-in-law were doing, and ever so much more—and all the while he was hunting for something in the drawers of the *escritoire*. At last he said

to me quite anxiously—‘ Henry, did you set this room straight when I went away in such a hurry a little time ago.’ ‘ Yes, Baron,’ said I. ‘ Did not you find a little gold heart-shaped locket anywhere about ?’ ‘ No,’ said I; and then he began his search again—and I searched with him, but there was nothing to be found. At last he had to give it up, but he looked very sad and disappointed. ‘ Do you know, Henry, this is a terrible loss to me? I would give you fifty thalers, if you could find me that locket.’ Then he took his hat and stick, for he always wore plain clothes when he was down here, and said he meant to take a turn in the park before he called on the ladies. Yes—but I knew well enough where he was going.

“ Those fifty thalers haunted me, Lieutenant, and I set to work again to

hunt and hunt, but it was all of no use. Then I took the light, and went into the bedroom adjoining. Presently I fancied I heard the door of the sitting-room open as noiselessly as possible, so I came out again quickly, and nearly tumbled over in surprise, for there, in the room, stood Sanna. She started and seemed taken aback at seeing me."

"Well, this I must say, Lieutenant—I have grown old now and quieter-like in my feelings, but in those days I could not abide that great meagre outlandish woman, with her cold grey eyes, her black hair and yellow complexion—she was always a false creature. So I just turned on her, and asked what in the devil's name she might be wanting there. 'My lady wished to know when Baron Fritz is coming back,' she said. She always called me 'Enrico' in those days,

for she was proud of her Italian birth. 'Where is the Baron?' she began again, in her prying way. 'Be off with you, to old Nick, if you like, but don't come spying here. I don't know where he is;' and with that I tried to push her out. 'Hark!' said she, and when I was still we heard a bell down in the village, tolling for someone that was dead. She began to cross herself and to murmur a paternoster, but I gave her a push, and sent her out. 'There, you can finish that the other side the door, do you understand?' Upon this, she turned to me again, and said—'Do you know who it is that is dead, Enrico? It is young Lisette of the Mill.'

"Young Lisette of the Mill! It came upon me with such a shock that my whole body was set a-trembling. 'Good Lord! What will Baron Fritz say?'

was my first thought. He had gone to her, looking so happy and light of heart. And now to think she was dead, the bonnie lass! Ah, that girl, sir, was as fair a sight as you would wish to behold. But there, the young Lizzie down at the Mill now—I beg pardon, your honour's wife that is to be, I mean—is as like her great-aunt as like can be. If you see one, you see the other. Lizzie is the very moral of that poor young creature whose story I am telling you, sir. Well, as I stood there, a storm burst overhead quite suddenly. The trees were bent double and groaned, and the wind went howling and roaring round the old walls till they creaked again. Baron Fritz did not return. Time went on, and the weather grew worse and worse. The hurricane raged and tore at the towers, as though it would pull them to the earth. One

could distinguish nothing in the darkness, though I tried hard to see out, pressing my face against the window-panes. The Castle clock had struck ten, and yet he had not returned. Sir, it was a fearful night. Presently the door flew open, and as I turned round, there before my astonished eyes stood Baron Fritz. He was standing in the middle of the room, and at his feet, pale and drenched and bedraggled, lay mad Francy, holding up both her hands to him in despairing entreaty."

" 'Ask my sister-in-law to step round here for a minute, Henry,' he said, speaking very low.

"I flew to the door, for I felt that something dreadful had happened, seeing the girl there in that fainting state. As I forced open the door, I met the Baroness—your grandmother, sir—just

outside. She was coming in ; but when she caught sight of her brother-in-law she recoiled. A sudden shock of fear sent a quiver through her, and she hid something quickly in the folds of her dress. Next minute she came into the room, to all appearance quiet and collected.

“I don’t think there ever was a more beautiful woman than she appeared then, Lieutenant, as she stood before us in her long white night-dress, her black hair half unloosed, and her great dark eyes gleaming in her pale face. She looked like an angel of innocence in the presence of that poor whining creature on the floor.

“‘*Mio caro amico,*’ cried she to the Baron, ‘what is the meaning of this?’ and she pointed to Francy with an air of surprise.

“‘Come in, Madam, if you please,’ he

replied roughly. ‘Go, Henry, and close the door.’

“Then for the first time he turned his face towards me. Sir, I was at that time a sturdy young fellow, with nerves of iron, but at sight of it I trembled. His eyes seemed sunken, the healthy young face had grown old and haggard with the maddening pain, and his mouth worked fiercely, telling of the terrible wrath that was in him. I shall never, my whole life long, forget his look, or the terror and anxiety I felt as I closed the door upon the Baroness. My teeth were chattering with agitation as I stood outside in the corridor, fascinated, as it were, to the spot. Sanna crept up to me, and there we both remained, hardly daring to draw our breath. At first we could make out nothing of what they were saying inside; we only heard the

young Baroness's soft tones, and Francy's sobs in between. But then came words of thunder which rang plainly in our ears.

“ ‘ Murderess ! ’ cried Baron Fritz, and he cursed the lady and all his house.

“ I stood as one petrified. Presently the door flew open, and the Baroness rushed out. She sped along the corridor and down the stairs like some hunted animal. Her face was ghastly pale. When she reached the floor below she threw her arms round a pillar, as though to save herself from falling ; then she slipped unconscious to the ground. I can see her still, lying there, a white figure all huddled up together. Sanna ran down to her, screaming as she went. She took her up in her arms, and carried her away. Almost at the same moment Francy was thrust out into the passage,

and the Baron appeared in the doorway. 'My horse!' he called, in a hoarse voice, and as I hurried downstairs I saw Francy with her face hidden in her hands, running out of the hall into the darkness and the raging storm. I led round the Baron's horse. He swung himself into the saddle, still with the same dreadful, haunted look in his face. The poor beast reared high in the air, he dug his spurs so deep into its flanks; then it tore away with him so rapidly that I thought an accident must happen. Suddenly he came back. I was still standing out on the steps in the wind and the rain, listening to the tramp of the horse's feet as it came nearer and nearer. He threw a piece of money to me.

"'Listen, Henry,' he said. 'You are to go to my old mother, and say I bid her good-bye. She will never see my

face again.' The last words I could hardly make out; either the noise of the storm drowned them, or his voice was choked with tears, I do not know which. He gave me his hand, and then he rode off, sir, and never came back to the place any more.

"But Francy I saw once again. She was crouching out there beneath the old trees in the park. When she saw him ride away into the dark, dreadful night, she uttered such a fearful shriek that I ran over to see what it was. I found her, sir, a poor miserable creature, eaten up by grief and remorse. I soon discovered that she was not so bad as report said, and I did what I could to comfort her in her trouble. Well, she told me the story then—told me how it had been settled that Baron Fritz and Lisette were to be separated, and how the poor

girl had died of grief because she had been made to believe that he had been unfaithful to her, and—and that is all I can tell you of the matter, sir.”

“You think, Henry, that my grandmother really planned . . .”

“Oh, sir, it is not for me to think ill of the family I serve. I have no proof that Baron Fritz was justified in uttering those terrible curses; but I know to a certainty that the Baroness and he had long been on very cool terms, because he—well, he had interfered in some of her affairs. Then she was cruelly proud; she would never at any price have acknowledged Lisette as her sister-in-law, and so . . . Lieutenant, no offence; I think I may say it, for I have known you from your cradle up . . . don’t take it amiss, but Lizzie. . . ”

“You are speaking of my promised bride, Henry.”

“Sir, I know it, and when I saw you two together, I rejoiced as I never thought to rejoice again in this world. Ah, sir, be a rock of defence to your young wife, and never leave her out of your sight. It makes one anxious to think of a young creature like that living up here at the Castle. Forgive me, sir. It has been a hard task to me to say this to you, but the likeness between her and that poor Lisette is so strong, especially about the eyes—they are just as blue and deep and clear, and have the same sweet look in them. Such eyes, once seen, are not easily forgotten. God grant they may never shed any tears but tears of joy.”

The old man's voice shook with emotion, and his “good-night” was hardly audible to his master's ears as he turned and left the room. Armand made no

response to it. He was picturing to himself those deep blue childish eyes as he had seen them that evening, so vaguely apprehensive, so unspeakably mournful.

“The same eyes,” he muttered to himself; “the same expression!” and, as he spoke, he glanced across at the portrait of the beautiful Agneta Maud. The candle had burnt down in its socket, and gave but a flicker of light from time to time, and the luxuriant, brightly-burnished red hair showed only as an indistinct cloud in the semi-obscurity. But the two dark eyes in that pale face gazed fixedly over at the young officer, gazed with the old mournful, wistful longing in them, seeking ever, and ever in vain, the happiness that was lost to them. Those surely were the eyes of which he had been vaguely reminded early that evening, as he stood before the carriage-door and

looked up in the face of his promised wife. They belonged to one who had always exercised a spell over him, to his ancestress, the beautiful Agneta Maud.

CHAPTER IX.

ON the following morning Armand went down to the Mill ; his future father-in-law had desired an interview. He did not see Lizzie. Old Aunty, who came out of the kitchen and opened the door, told him, in answer to his inquiries, that she was still asleep. "A little quiet rest was needful, and did one a power of good when one had watched and wept the whole night through."

A cloud lay on Army's brow as he entered the master's private room. He had so longed for a sight of Lizzie, and the thought that she had been weeping

all night was grievous to him. He had to wait a few minutes ; Herr Erving was over the way, in the counting-house. Involuntarily his eyes took note of his surroundings. The room was well appointed, and had an air of comfort with its dark carpet and green furniture and hangings. On a massive bureau stood a portrait. It was a photograph of Lizzie, taken when she was a child ; the lovely little face smiled forth so brightly, with all the arch innocence of tender years. He took up the picture to examine it more closely, and was still intent upon it when Herr Erving came in.

The master's noble-looking face wore an expression which was not habitual to it, an expression of care and lassitude. He had evidently passed a wakeful night.

"Excuse my keeping you waiting," he began, offering his hand to the young

man. "Sit down, pray, and let us to business at once. I will not use many unnecessary words," he continued, pushing a chair forward to the table. "The first thing to be done, I think, will be for us to go over to the town where you are quartered, and settle your affairs there. Then you must send in your resignation. Do not take it in ill part that on this point I express my wishes decidedly. She is my only child," his voice shook a little as he spoke these words, "and at least I will have her near me, under my protection."

Armand bowed assentingly, but the hot blood rushed to his temples.

"I make no unjust conditions," went on the other; "you know that in days gone by, my family acquired by purchase from yours a considerable portion of the Castle lands. Now, Lizzie is our only

child, and my wife and I, having well talked over the matter, are of opinion that it will be best for you to be what your fathers were before you, namely, Master of Derenberg. I have this morning written to Hellwig to tell him how the case stands, and have made an appointment to see him in S——. My principal object in this is to find out how much of the land which originally belonged to your family estates may be bought back. It is now parcelled out among many owners, and some of it is by no means in the best of hands. We shall endeavour to regain possession of as much as possible, and to add it to the nucleus you still retain. I trust that the scheme may in a great measure prove successful. In return for this, I ask, I expect from you, that you make her” He broke off abruptly, and, going up to his bureau, searched among the papers there.

“I did not give my consent to this marriage willingly,” he went on, turning to the young man, and speaking in a mild, low tone, “for I feared that my daughter might encounter much that would be distressing and humiliating; but she would have it so. I know little of you, in fact, except as a child, for since you have reached man’s estate you have not crossed my threshold; but the little I do know hardly invites my whole and entire confidence. Hitherto, as it seems to me, you have faithfully followed in your grandmother’s steps, and that lady, I am aware, looks on people of my class as a race altogether inferior. Your ancestors thought otherwise. I have now given you the dearest and best that my invalid wife and myself possess on earth; in return, I demand that you will uphold and shield my child from all

annoyance and insult. I will not have her subjected to the treatment your unfortunate mother has met with at the hands of the Dowager Baroness. I require from you now a promise to this effect. I shall hold you responsible for any tears I may see in my daughter's eyes. Will you give me your word that you will do all that lies in your power to shield my child from that lady's arrogance?"

He held out his hand. Armand could have fallen on his neck and wept. Derenberg was to be his again. The fairest dream of his life was to be realized. Yet a great load weighed on his heart, impairing even this first burst of joy.

"Lizzie shall never repent having rescued me from the dark future that was before me," he said, placing his hand in Erving's. "I can and will

protect her in all things, and especially in the way you name. I will go to my grandmother at once."

Erving cast a rapid, scrutinizing glance at the young man before him. Armand appeared calm, but there was a fierce, dangerous gleam in his eye.

"Do not allow yourself to be carried away," warned the elder man, laying his hand on Army's shoulder. "She is your father's mother, remember, and old age is to be respected. All I ask is that she may not be allowed to distress and harass my child; for the rest, she may act as she sees fit. So be calm, Army; do you hear? She is an old woman; do not forget what is due to her."

It was the first time he had addressed the young officer by his Christian name. Armand looked up at him, moved almost beyond control. This was the man of

whom he had once said in his foolish pride, "I cannot hold intercourse with such as he." No father could have cared for him more generously. To him he would owe all—all the good that was to come to him in this life.

"Go now, Army," said Erving, as the other grasped his hand and pressed it without speaking. "This afternoon we will start on our journey. Go, and once more, be moderate."

Armand went out as in a dream. There, at the end of the long avenue, rose the Castle, with its great escutcheoned portal. He stopped and considered it for a moment. That day he appeared to himself so mean, so pitiful!

Presently he raised his head, and, drawing himself erect, passed on into the Castle. A look of resolution had settled on his face as he ascended the

stairs leading to his grandmother's room. Nelly came running down to meet him, her eyes beaming like the merry sunshine.

"How is Lizzie, Army?" she asked, standing on the steps above him, and putting her arms round his neck.

"Will you do me a favour, little one?" he asked in his turn, smoothing back her hair from her forehead.

She nodded eagerly.

"Then go to her, will you? Soon—at once—and tell her I send my love, and she must not fret any more. Tell her I entreat her not to fret, do you hear?" He freed himself hastily from his little sister's arms, and sprang past her. Then seeing a surprised, inquiring look on Nelly's face, he called back to her as he went, "Go quickly, dear, and stay with Lizzie a little. I have some things to talk over with Granny."

In the corridor above, Sanna brushed quickly by him with a "Good morning" rather snappishly spoken.

"Can I speak to my grandmother now?" he inquired.

"I have been twice to your room, Baron," she replied. "Your grand-mamma is waiting impatiently for you."

He passed her quickly and entered. The old lady was sitting in her accustomed place by the fire. She greeted him with a slight inclination of the head, and pointed to a seat. "You have kept me waiting a long time," she said.

"I have had an important interview with Herr Erving," he answered, sitting down. "He has been so good as to explain to me his plans for our future."

"So the experiment has succeeded, after all," she said, using his own words.

"Well, as the sacred rings have not yet

been exchanged, I suppose the matter still admits of some discussion."

He waved his hand with an impatient gesture.

"You will allow me to say a few words on the subject, I presume?" she asked.

Armand bowed slightly. His attention was suddenly attracted to an open letter which his grandmother held between her slender fingers. He knew that thick, cream-coloured paper. At sight of it the hot blood rushed to his heart and set it throbbing.

"In the first place," the old lady began, taking a second letter from a table which stood near her, "in the first place, here is a charming note I have received from the Duke. He wishes to know exactly how you are circumstanced, and promises to interest himself in every way in your behalf. That is a promise

the true bearing of which I trust you will know how to appreciate. Your position in the army is secure, and your future career assured beyond all doubt." She looked at him keenly. "My advice therefore is, that the ridiculous farce you are carrying on down at the Mill be brought to an end, and that you set out at once for S——."

"Granny," he replied quietly, "you cannot possibly mean that in earnest."

"I do indeed," she declared. "You have rushed headlong into this folly, and have got yourself entangled with a set of common people; it is my wish to save you from them, and to place you in circumstances better befitting your rank."

"Better befitting my rank," he repeated. "That would be difficult. The position on which I am about to enter is the best that could be imagined for me."

“You are to be head man to your future father-in-law, perhaps? Rag-miller number two, eh?”

“If you please, Granny, we will drop the subject. I should not have gone back from my word had your proposition held out any temptation to me. I am less likely to do so, feeling not the smallest, the very smallest, inclination to recede.”

“Then I will leave the house,” she cried in wrath; “and that before your wife sets foot in it.”

“That would grieve me, Granny. With a little kindness now you could make amends for much. But if you really cannot . . .”

“It will be best that I should go, you mean?” she asked. “Very well, Army, it shall be so. Look, the way out of the difficulty is found.”

She held the cream-coloured page before his eyes, and he recognised the delicate handwriting of his faithless love. Involuntarily he shrank back. "Blanche!" he exclaimed in a low voice. "Blanche writing to you!"

"Do you know what she writes? She begs me to accompany her on a journey to Italy, the Colonel being prevented by the duties of his service from going with her. What I should best like would be to fling the scrawl with all its flattering words back in her face; but as things now stand, I see no other solution—I shall accept her offer."

"You would—you could do that? You would go to the woman who was guilty of such treachery to me, Granny?" cried the young man, seizing her hand.

"There is no alternative left me. I cannot live on equal terms with the

people down yonder. I cannot, and I will not!" she persisted.

"Then, indeed, it will be best that you should go," he said, in a low voice, turning from her.

"And these are your thanks for all my love? This is the fulfilment of all the hopes I founded on you!" she gasped. "Incredible. When I think of you sitting down there in that office, on your father-in-law's stool, writing and keeping books!" she went on, almost panting for breath; "you, who are now madly throwing away the prospect of a splendid career."

"I must have accepted the position if my father-in-law had chosen to assign to me a stool in his office, but he has done better by me than that. Lizzie will bring as her dowry the lands that were lost to us. I shall be Master of

Derenberg, as my ancestors were before me."

He spoke slowly, emphasizing every word. She wheeled round on him suddenly ; her great eyes, half veiled beneath their drooping lids, scrutinized him curiously, as though she did not believe his words.

"The advantage will be dearly bought!" she articulated at length with an effort.

"How so?"

"You will be irrevocably bound to a woman whom all your equals will look down upon ; whom, in short, you do not, cannot, never will, love."

"Who tells you that?" he said, a subtle smile playing about the corners of his mouth. "Is it so utterly impossible? I should have thought your experience might have served you with proofs to the contrary. Remember my

great-uncle Fritz, and the beautiful Lisette."

The old lady made no answer. She threw herself back in her chair, and her fingers, closing on Blanche's letter, crushed it into a ball. Her face had grown very white—white as the lace on her cap.

"My brother-in-law never entertained the idea of marrying the girl," she said at length. "I must do him that justice. It was an intrigue, such as men of the world will have by dozens. The knowledge of that story should, one would have thought, have restrained you from taking as your wife any girl from the Ervings' house."

"By no means—quite the contrary. If anything had been needed to confirm my resolution, it would be this idea. By my marriage with Lizzie Erving I

may hope in some degree to make amends for the evil which senseless pride and an ungenerous spirit of revenge wrought in days gone by."

"These dark hints and allusions are quite unintelligible to me," she interrupted, rising excitedly. "Your grandfather's brother was a man who had no control over his passions, who led a dissipated, gay life. He went to ruin, and died God knows where. He was a hypocrite, who hid all his idle, immoral tendencies under the mask of seeming honesty and frankness. I am sorry you allowed yourself to be taken in by this wonderful legend, wherein the pious lieutenant of hussars and the girl Lisette are made to play the part of saints. But for this very reason, precisely because of the unsuitable connection which once existed between us and the people down

yonder (though, thank God, by the act of a clearer judgment the connection was speedily brought to an end), I declare and reiterate to you that I never will accept this girl as your wife, that I never will hold out my hand to her. If you persist in your present intention—well, I shall go. I now know whither.” She held up Blanche’s letter to him. “Though it will be hard to me to take this step, to make friends with the woman who deceived and betrayed you, I shall prefer even that to the prospect of living under the same roof with that person.”

Her lips quivered, and her eyes flashed with rage.

“ Well, go then, Granny. I am grieved that it should have come to this, but you would indeed have a right to say I am no man, but a weak effeminate dreamer, whose arm has been paralysed by the

first stroke of misfortune, were I now to alter my determination. As a man of honour, I could not do it. I *will* not do it, because I am not so foolish as to forfeit a whole life-time of happiness."

"You yourself bid me go?" asked the old lady, breathlessly.

"No, Granny. I should wish that you might live on in my house in peace, but if you put the choice before me, 'she or I,' I can only reply decidedly, I choose my promised wife."

He had raised his voice as he spoke these words, and there was a glad honest ring in it.

"Good," she answered; "I will go. If you were to kneel to me now, if you were all to wring your hands, beseeching and praying me to remain, yet I would go. It is scandalous, monstrous!"

She tore at the bell-rope, and with trem-

bling haste began to pull open the different drawers of her writing-table; letters, cases, little card-board boxes, flew out pell-mell.

“My travelling trunks!” she ordered, as Sanna appeared. “Go and pack up your things. We are going on a journey.”

At this moment a small shining object fell to the ground close to Armand’s feet. It was a small heart-shaped gold locket, much scratched and tarnished; on it were engraved the letters “L. E.” He stood for some time with it in his hand in silence. Then he went up to the old Baroness, and without a word held up the little gold heart before her eyes. She looked at it, and suddenly leaned against the table for support. The colour faded from her cheeks, and a livid pallor overspread her face. Not a sound broke the stillness, save the slight jar of the little

statuettes on the writing table, on which the Baroness was leaning heavily.

“I have no right to utter reproaches,” he said at length, drawing back the hand which held the trinket. “You are my father’s mother, and—and, besides, it would be useless. But I shall now strive doubly hard by my behaviour to my wife to redeem some of the wrong you once did to a young creature, innocent and pure as herself. God grant I may succeed!” He turned to leave the room.

Then Sanna barred the way. “What is this quarrel with my mistress?” she cried. “I took the gold amulet from Baron Fritz. I did it myself, my Signora is blameless. Drive me away, if you like, but do not deprive her of her home, of the only place where she can rest her head in comfort.” The old servant had sunk down on her knees, and was holding

up her hands to him imploringly. A tear was glistening in her cold grey eyes.

“I am not sending your mistress away,” said Army, touched by the stern old woman’s fidelity. “On the contrary, I . . .”

“Get up,” dictated the Baroness, “and do as I bid you. Not a word more. I shall leave to-day.”

“*Misericordia!*” sobbed Sanna, in her terror grasping the heavy black folds of her lady’s dress. “Take me with you, Signora Eleanora. I should die without you.”

Armand glanced regretfully at the commanding figure standing in the centre of the room, with the proud head well thrown back. The gleaming dark eyes surveyed him with a haughty hostile look, as though some unknown beggar were before her whom she was about to cast

out from her presence. He had always loved her so well, admired her so profoundly; even now that the halo, with which his heart had once surrounded her, had vanished, the old love remained victrix. He forgave her her imperious temper, her harsh ways; he only saw in her the proud, high-bred woman, of noble presence and imperial beauty, who had lavished on him in his childhood an almost idolatrous affection.

“Granny,” he said, going a step nearer her, “let all that has happened this day be forgotten. I offer you my hand. Nothing here shall remind you of that which has passed between us.”

“Go,” she rejoined shortly, waving his dismissal to him, in her haughty yet graceful way. “Go, I wish to be alone. I have much to set in order.”

He went up to her. “Good-bye,” he

said. "Should you ever feel home-sick, come back to us. You will find"

"Adieu!" she broke in, drawing away her hand as he would have carried it to his lips. "You have made your choice. That is sufficient." She turned her back upon him.

"Oh, that curse, that curse! Oh, *Dio mio!*" sobbed the old serving-woman, wringing her hands, as she knelt before her mistress on the floor.

"Fool!" he heard his grandmother say harshly. Then the door fell to on its hinges, separating him from her.

CHAPTER X.

THE last day of the old year! Is there not always a certain solemn melancholy about it? Our hearts, attuned to a farewell sadness, are busy with retrospection, with anxious forecasts into the future. What has the dying year brought us, of good or of evil? What has it taken from us? And—timidly this, with some vague apprehension—what will the new year bring? Pain or pleasure? Joy or bitter trouble and loss?

There is a time when we do not ask ourselves these questions, a time when we firmly believe that the future must

grow brighter day by day, when our dream-garden is full of the loveliest blossom, and we, in happy impatience, await the blooming of the buds, delighting beforehand in the wealth of flowers which will then be ours. But time passes, and blossom after blossom falls faded to the earth. Here and there a solitary one may yet unfold and send forth its fragrance, but trembling ever with uncertainty and fear lest the rough blast, which has destroyed its sisters, may blight it in its turn. They who have seen many of these fair buds perish stand at the gate of the New Year with anxious misgiving at their hearts, and timidly ask—"What will the future bring? Will the blossom of hope within us wither prematurely, or will it expand beneath bright and genial rays?" Sad is it, indeed, when this question comes to the young; when a sharp, cruel frost in

their spring-time destroys all the sunny promise of their lives !

About four o'clock in the afternoon, Lizzie's restless thoughts drove her up to the Castle. Army had gone away with her father four days before, and she had received no news of him, and this was St. Sylvester's Day, an anniversary which had always filled the house with welcome guests. How different was it this year ! Her father from home, her mother more still and quiet than ever, old Auntie in a desponding mood, poor "Uncle Pastor" and his good wife in deepest grief, mourning for their darling—and she herself—Ah, all was changed !

As she walked up the avenue to the Castle, her mind was busy with many conjectures. Would his mother or Nelly have heard from him ? she wondered. Her father's letter had been so brief.

He had found matters far more complicated than he anticipated, he wrote, and it was uncertain as yet when he would be able to return. Not a word for her having reference to Army.

She *must* hear something of him to-day! As she walked on, she looked through the bare boughs of the trees and up the avenue to the portico which rose majestically in the distance. Heavy grey clouds obscured the sky, and the air was unpleasantly close. In the pale winter light, the sombre old Castle looked almost weird, so empty did it appear, so deserted. "A proper nest for trouble's brood," as old Aunty said. How many years had come and gone over that ancient roof; how many would yet come and go, and what would they bring? That which is lost cannot be had back again, and she . . . oh, how infinite had

been her loss ! A blight had fallen on her spring-time of love. The fair blossoms had perished, and only thorns were left, thorns firmly planted in her sore and wounded heart. No sweet domestic happiness for her with the man she loved, only a life of severe self-forgetfulness. Sad would be her smiles at best ; there was no love for her, and therefore no letter.

What, after all, could he have found to say to her ? She remembered to have once seen her mother open with a happy smile a packet of old letters which had been kept carefully locked in a little box. “ Your father’s letters,” Frau Erving had replied in answer to the girl’s question, “ written during the time we were engaged.” What blissful content had beamed in her mother’s eyes as she looked over her treasure ! Lizzie pressed her hands on her breast, and walked

quickly on towards her destination. She came to the end of the avenue, and, issuing from it, traversed the open space before the house. A carriage was standing at the side-door. A carriage! How came a carriage there? Could Army . . . ? But no, in that case her father would also have arrived.

She shook her head as she passed round the strange vehicle. It was a lamentable-looking old coach, probably a fly from the village.

Entering the Castle, the girl struck into a passage which led to the principal hall and staircase. Presently she paused, thinking she heard steps and voices. It was already growing dusk in that long vaulted corridor, wherein only a faint light penetrated from the staircase window beyond. She went on again hesitatingly.

“It has been your own doing,” she heard the old Baroness’s harsh voice protesting; “and I must say I think tears on your part altogether superfluous, Cornelia.”

Then came the rustle of dresses and the sound of footsteps. As Lizzie reached the hall, she saw the elder Baroness standing on the top stair, half turning to speak to her daughter-in-law and Nelly, who were behind her. She was wrapped in what doubtless had once been a costly pelisse trimmed with fur, and her proud face looked out unmoved as ever from the folds of the black lace shawl which she had thrown over her head.

“I am so afraid for you, mamma,” said the younger Baroness. “In such weather as this! And you who are so unaccustomed to the fatigue and discomfort of travelling!”

Travelling! She was going to travel. A thrill of joy shot through Lizzie's heart.

"'Tis the natural consequence of the system you have followed, Cornelia," was the reply. "But you need not be uneasy on my account. I am not so infirm yet that I . . ."

"It has all come about too quickly, mamma, too quickly!"

"Too quickly? I have counted the minutes with impatience. If I could, I would have left within the hour."

"It is hard for me to see you part from us in this way, to think that there is not a perfectly good understanding . . ."

"It certainly has not been my fault if a good understanding does not exist between us. I sought to establish one, but I could not make myself understood. Do you think it is a light thing for me to go? At this moment I feel profoundly

the sadness, the importance of the step I am taking. Wretched as most of my life has been here, it pains me to leave. But to remain on the conditions the future master of Derenberg proposes, to lead the existence he has planned for me, sacrificing my principles to his newly-adopted, and by no means aristocratic notions, never! I am of the old school, and feel that *Noblesse oblige!*”

“She is going on my account,” murmured Lizzie to herself.

“I think Army left with the persuasion that he should find you here on his return,” expostulated the daughter-in-law.

The old lady laughed out loud. “*Dio mio!*” she cried, “he knew very well that he should not find me here; and it is better so. I do not wish to see him again. He refuses an offer which would

have opened out to him a brilliant career."

"I know," interrupted the younger lady. "The Duke . . ."

"Not a word more!" The Dowager waved her hand, and walked straight down the stairs.

"Please stay one minute, Baroness," said a trembling voice, and Lizzie bent forward towards her out of the dim twilight. "Stay one minute. It is not yet too late. If it is as you say, I . . . I will give Army back his freedom. I did not know that any other way of saving him had been, could be, found." She paused, and grasped mechanically at the carved balustrade. The dark, majestic figure before her recoiled, startled, as it seemed, and alarmed.

With one bound, Nelly sprang to her friend's side. "What are you saying,

Lizzie," she warned, seizing the other's hand. "Think what you are doing."

"You should have considered well before this, young lady," said the Dowager, sharply. "This proof of better judgment may now come all too late."

"I wanted to help him, to save him," murmured poor Lizzie; "but I never would have stood in the way of his happiness. Oh, it is surely not too late, Baroness," she cried imploringly, as the old lady moved on, throwing back her haughty head with the inimitable gesture of pride peculiar to her.

"Wait till he comes, my lady, and tell him he is bound by no obligations to me. I myself set him free, that he may find elsewhere the happiness I cannot give him. He does not love me, I know. Oh, stay, stay!"

The old lady did not shake off the

trembling little hands which had caught at her mantle. She stood as though fascinated, gazing at the lovely, wistful face which was uplifted to her, its pale contours just discernible in the dim mysterious twilight of the dying winter day. Her features remained unmoved. Not a trace of compassion for the poor distressed child shone in those black eyes; not a word passed her lips. She let her victim drink the cup of anguish to the dregs.

Suddenly a hasty, well-known tread resounded through the hall, and yonder in the faintly lighted corridor the slender figure of a young man became distinguishable. The girl watched it as it approached, watched with dry, burning eyes. He was coming now. She would have to meet him again. Was this drop to be added? Was her trial to be made

still more terrible to her? As though she would shut out the whole world from view, in order to be strong, she covered her face with both hands.

“What is all this?” she heard him say hastily, and in an agitated voice. “My affianced wife is in trouble!”

His affianced wife! How the word hurt her! Oh, if she were only away from there! a thousand miles away, that she might escape the torture.

“She shows herself more sensible than you,” responded the old lady. “Once again you are free to choose the path you will take, for she is ready to retire. . . .”

“I see; you have plausibly talked her over,” he said, in an angry tone.

“No, Army,” interposed his mother, “Lizzie heard accidentally that grand-mamma. . . .”

“What was it you heard, Lizzie?” he

asked, putting his arm round her, and bending down to her. How soft and gentle his voice grew now !

She made no answer, but at his address the great tears rolled from her eyes, and filtered through the slender fingers which still concealed her face. She did not see how anxiously his eyes were fixed upon her ; she only felt that she must lose him, and that even a loveless life at his side would have been as heaven, compared with the desert void which awaited her when she had renounced her claim upon him.

“ Lizzie ! ” he entreated, “ can you really be so . . . so sensible as my grandmother has just declared ? ”

She nodded.

“ Yes, yes, ” she sobbed, calling up all her self-command. “ I did not know that the Duke would help you, or . . . or I

never should have come up here to . . . I thought I . . . I alone could save you."

"And it is so," he said, in a low voice. "You alone, no other creature in the whole wide world."

He drew her hands from her face, and looked into her tearful eyes.

"Lizzie, if you knew how anxiously I have been thinking of you!"

She shook her head.

"I have been haunted by a pair of mournful blue eyes, by an old sad story I heard not long ago of one who resembled you much, and who was brought to an early grave by grief and distress of mind. A sort of horror took possession of me; and my apprehension, my presentiment, was not altogether groundless. A few minutes more, and I should have come too late, should I not?"

“No, no, Army, it is compassion that makes you speak so. You do not know what you are giving up, a bright, happy life, a brilliant career. Leave me, it is not too late yet!” she besought him piteously.

“You foolish child, I know exactly what I am giving up, and I know, too, what I am gaining by the exchange—the best, the noblest, the fairest treasure this world can give.”

All had grown still in the vaulted hall, on the grand old staircase—still and dark. Below, the sound of a carriage was heard, rattling away over the pavement. The last day of the old year was fast waning. What would the New Year bring?

CHAPTER XI.

THE earth was arrayed in all her spring loveliness. Trees and bushes were clothed in their first fresh, tender green. The narcissus and lilacs were all in bloom in the Ervings' garden; the golden laburnum bowed over the hedge, and the branches of the hawthorn drooped beneath their load of rosy blossoms. In the park the mild warm breeze swayed the young leaves of the lindens to and fro, and kissed every blade of grass on the broad emerald lawn, as though whispering to them of the new life and joys to come. The fountain, too, discoursed of pleasant things, as it rose crystal-clear from its

sandstone basin to fall again in a plashing, sparkling rain. As in the old days long ago, the chief entrance to the Castle stood wide open, the massive doors being thrown back on either side, as though awaiting the lord and master, who would shortly lead his beautiful young wife over the threshold of his ancestral home. The green carpet of moss had disappeared from the broad flight of steps, and the two old bears looked forth grandly defiant from beneath a couple of enormous green oak wreaths, with which a sportive hand had crowned their venerable heads.

Almost all the windows down the long line of the Castle façade were open ; two or three only were veiled with thick curtains. These rooms required no spring sunshine, for their mistress was absent. She had gone, really gone ! She had been impassible to the last.

Not an eyelash had trembled, not a muscle moved in the proud face, as she mounted into the miserable conveyance that was to take her from a place which for years had been her home.

Her adieux had been brief and cold. She had just touched her daughter-in-law's brow with her lips, had saluted Nelly in the same way—and that was all. It stung her to feel that, by so sealing his fate in that dimly-lighted corridor, her grandson had secured a future better than any she could offer him, a future the brightness of which dazzled even herself. She closed her grand dark eyes as they drove past the *entrée d'honneur* and clenched her delicate hands, while Sanna leaned out of the carriage and looked back, sobbing wildly. Past the old place—away . . . What will the New Year bring her?

And now the young master was daily expected. While waiting to take possession of the lands which were to be his, he had been staying on a friend's estate, desiring to initiate himself without loss of time in the knowledge of his future vocation. Upstairs in the turret-chamber, which of old had always been kept locked, Nelly stood with the old man Henry. The two bow-windows were thrown wide open, and the girl was looking with a happy smile out over the park. Her eyes rested on the gleaming windows of the paper-mill which lay below imbedded, as it were, in flowers.

"Look, Henry," she cried. "Now I know why my brother wrote us word to get this particular room ready for him."

"Oh yes, there is a fine prospect to be had from here," said the old man, with a significant smile on his furrowed

face. "The Baron will never care to take another room when once he has dwelt in this."

"It certainly is delightful here!" cried Nelly, surveying the small round chamber. "How pleasant and cheerful it looks, and what a view there is from the window!"

For the hundredth time Henry set straight a couple of old-fashioned chairs which stood before a small oval table. "Now for the oak-wreaths outside the door, gracious Fräulein. Then he may come when he likes. I never thought I'd live to see the day!" he wound up, with a gladsome shake of his grey head. "Things do come about wonderfully in this world, gracious Fräulein, wonderfully do they, to be sure!"

At the Mill all, apparently, was going on in the old groove. One person, however, was wanting to the family circle.

The mistress had been absent for the last few weeks; she had gone to Italy with the Inspector's sick daughter, Bertha, but was soon to return, it was said, with renewed vigour and health greatly improved.

Old Aunty was feeling not a little anxious about her darling. Lizzie was too quiet for a girl in her position, thought the old woman. She would sit half the day, lost in a dreamy reverie. What she liked best was to shut herself up in her own little room, and leave to her Aunty all the care and worry of the mighty bales of linen which were now fetched out of the old store-chests, to be cut up and sewn into various garments. "It is all a matter of indifference to her," murmured the old woman sorrowfully, as her eyes wandered over the linen, that most important treasure of every house-

hold. "She takes no interest in her outfit. Poor child, how much she loses! She does not know how different it all is when one's sweetheart loves one with all his heart!" But every evening since last St. Sylvester the old hands had been folded in earnest thanksgiving—a great weight had been lifted; the Baroness had gone.

Again a May evening descended on the earth, a fragrant, moon-lit evening, and again the old woman sat at the lattice of her own little room with clasped hands, thinking. Out-of-doors the water murmured on ever the same old melody; the great Black Forest clock ticked monotonously, and the sound of the girls' voices came up from the yard, singing.

"Where can Lizzie be?" she asked herself. "Has he written to say he is coming, I wonder?" She got up, and

tripped out of the room, the moonbeams glancing as she went on her kind old face and snowy cap. "Lizzie!" she cried into the parlour. No answer. She went back across the dark hall and up the stairs.

"She is not crying, is she?" thought old Aunty, peeping into the girl's own snug little chamber. Not a trace of her she sought! She retreated, shaking her head as she went, and involuntarily turned her steps towards another door. Gently she opened it. The moonlight filled the small space with its white gleaming brilliance, and in this silver light, motionless before the window, stood the graceful slender figure of the maiden, looking out. The old woman paused spell-bound, gazing at the fair, familiar picture before her. Had the days of her youth returned to her? Was that Lisette keeping her vigil as of old?

“He is coming,” a sweet voice murmured exultingly. “He is coming, I can see the light!” and with a quick noiseless tread, Lizzie glided by the old woman and disappeared like some fair ghost.

True enough! A light glimmered over yonder in the turret-chamber. The old woman leaned heavily on the table by the window and gazed across at it. Lo, the past had quickened into life again.

“Almighty God!” she murmured, clasping her hands. “Am I dreaming, can I be dreaming? I wonder.”

Then some impulse drove her downstairs. With hesitating steps she passed out of the house. The garden lay spread out before her in the white moonlight, and the air was heavy with the scent of flowers. Again, as in her distant, distant youth, she sauntered on. The night-

ingales sang so pleasantly, and from over the way came the monotonous croaking concert of the frogs. Now she had reached the gravelled space before the harbour. Positively she could hear a whispering inside. She stole softly up to the bower, and drew back the branches. There they sat together, the girl with her arm about his neck, her face hidden on his breast, and he kissed again and again her pretty brown hair, and called her by the sweetest, tenderest names. Suddenly the head was raised, and by the bright moonbeam which fell full upon it, the old woman saw a pair of great blue eyes fixed with an expression of ineffable content on the earnest face which was bending over it.

Carefully she relaxed her hold on the branches, and stepped back; she had seen enough. Softly, softly, she went back

along the gravel path, wiping her eyes from time to time with the corner of her apron. Under the lime-trees before the house-door, deep shadows lay. She sat down on the sandstone seat, and looking back towards the garden, folded her hands and murmured words of fervent thanksgiving. That which she had hardly dared to hope had become a reality.

From across the water sounded a fresh girlish voice, mingling with all the spring melodies. A light dress shimmered in the moonlight; nearer and nearer came the song, till every word reached the old woman's ear distinctly.

“ Love, like spring, comes softly,
Armed with magic power,
At his touch the dry reed swiftly
Blossoms into flower.

“ He makes sweet music in the breast,
Which erst wearily did sigh,
No rosy May, no summer rest
For me, all hope is by ! ”

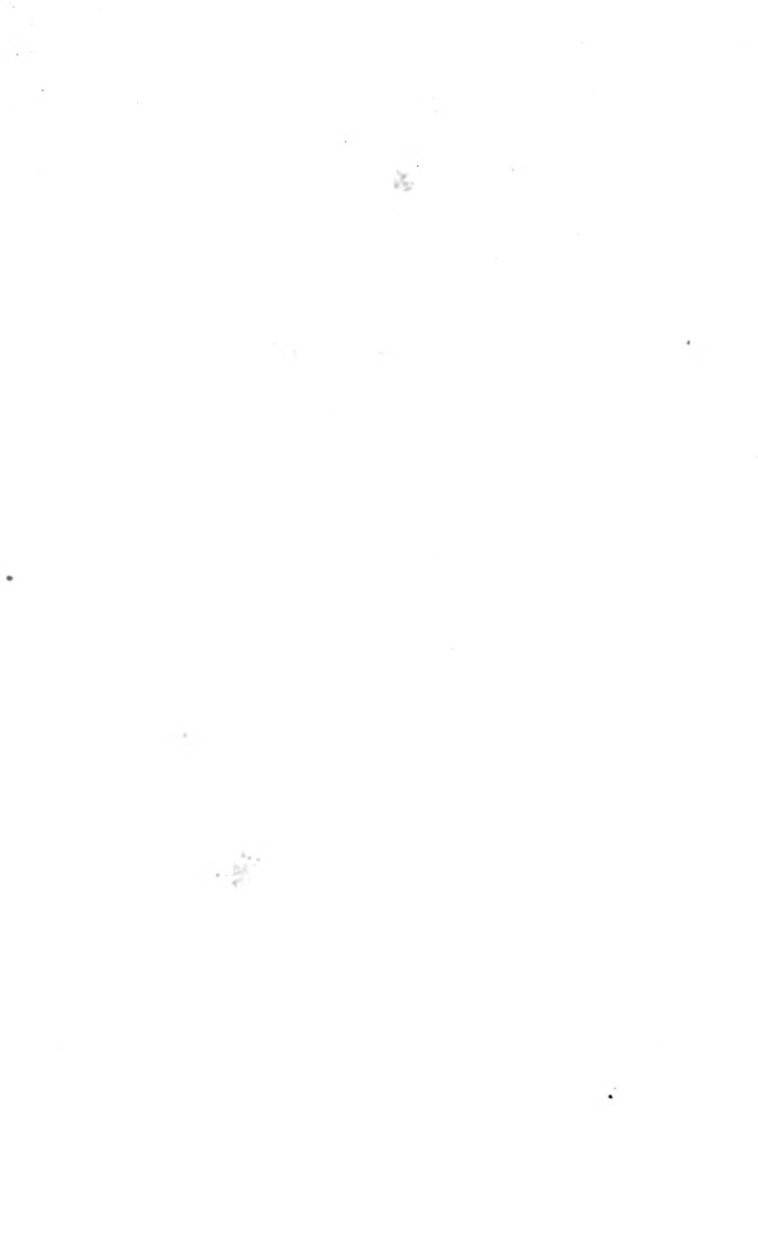
“Lizzie! Army!” called the singer into the quiet garden, as she stood beneath the limes. “Where are you?”

No answer—only the continuous trill of the nightingales.

“Let them be, Nelly,” said a voice near her. “Let them enjoy their happy May; so many storms swept over them, before their roses bloomed.”

The moonlight quivered over the tree-tops, the water plashed and rippled on, and again and again the old woman’s murmured words of prayer and praise went up to Heaven—“May God bless them! May God preserve long to them their spring-time and their roses!”

THE END.





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